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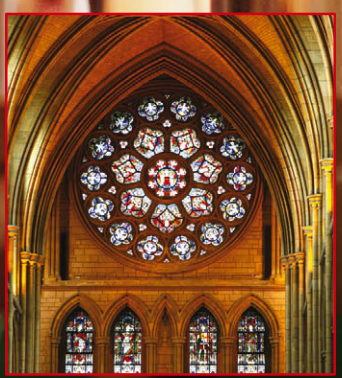
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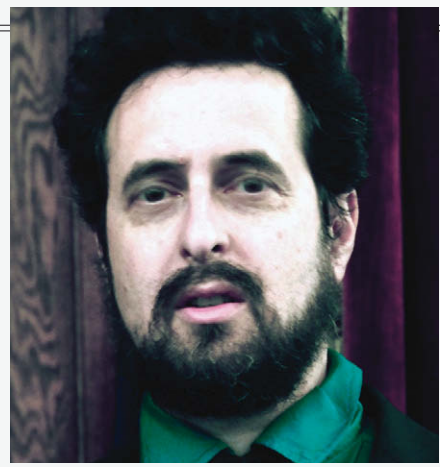
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# *Matthew Malsky*

## The composer on writing music, recording it – and listening back to it



**These works weren't 'designed' to sit together but you say you now recognise they share an 'underlying mission'...**
I only came to think of them as being motivated by something consistent – expressions of time and space – at the recording. I'd always assumed that my motivations were more abstract and maybe formal. So that was a surprise.

**They mostly come from the years surrounding 2010 – were ideas of time and place occupying you then?**
They underlie most of my music but the 'geometries' idea goes way back. I studied with Ralph Shapey, who had a belief that 'sound objects' were the basic musical materials. I always found that idea attractive but it takes time to make it your own.

**But 'sound objects', as in *Elegy*, can simply be musical colours or textures?**
Yes. I want to make works that are architectonically sound, that are solid and innovative and interesting over a long time. But to get listeners to stay with a piece it needs to be understandable and graspable in the moment. So a technique like motivic development is in the service of both aims.

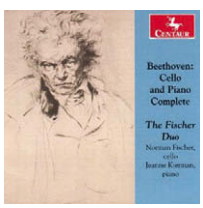
**So can you explain how the musical palindrome in *Elegy* works? It doesn't end with the same gesture it begins with...**
You're right – it's not a literal palindrome. The second half of the palindrome was reshaped and tightened to create music that closed out the emotional and musical ideas of the first half. There's also a metaphor at work: the piece was motivated by the loss of someone I knew who passed away tragically young. I think of the second half of the piece as a kind of unwinding, in memoriam.

**Are there instances when the realisation of the music is at odds with what you heard?**
Sure, there are many compromises in moving a piece from what I hear in my head to what comes out of the speaker; in truth I never have the sense that I'm transcribing what's in my head when I'm writing. But that compromise is always an opportunity to take the piece in directions that improve what I originally intended.

**Do you listen back to recordings of your own music?**
Boy do I! Partly because I'm so involved, partly because I find it enjoyable. I listened to these recordings almost constantly for about a year, putting my creative energy into doing so. For me as a composer that's a necessary step to finishing the works, from pen to speaker.

## Beethoven

'Cello and Piano Complete'
Five Cello Sonatas. Horn Sonata. Sonata, Op 64 (after Trio, Op 3). Variations on 'See, the conqu'ring hero comes'. Variations on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen'. Variations on 'Bei Männern'. Violin Sonata No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47 (arr Czerny)
**The Fischer Duo**
Centaur Ⓑ ④ CRC3322/5 (4h 14' • DDD)




Norman Fischer and Jeanne Kierman have been making music as a team since 1971, which would qualify them for some kind of award even if their artistry impressed only in terms of sheer endurance. But The Fischer Duo, as they are known, continue to shed illuminating light on the works they explore, particularly as displayed here on four discs comprising Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano.

To say this is a grand achievement would be an understatement. Fischer and Kierman have been performing these pieces since the start of their partnership, a practice that could have led to routine but instead reveals how committed they remain to exploring the music's riches. Beethoven made cellists forever happy by writing abundantly for the instrument, including transcriptions of works for other instruments. The pieces span some 30 years, allowing musicians and listeners to discern Beethoven's wondrous development as a composer.

Fischer, with his plummy, dark-toned timbre, and Kierman, a pianist who renders everything fresh and expressive, sound smitten with each bar in the 12 works on this set. The repertoire includes an early version of the first movement of the Sonata in A major, Op 69, and Beethoven's arrangement of the *Kreutzer* Sonata (originally for violin), which assumes a winning majesty as played on cello. The recording was made at the Shepherd School of Music at Houston's Rice University.
**Donald Rosenberg**

## M Brouwer

'Shattered – Chamber Music'
Shattered Glass[a]. Clarinet Quintet[b]. Whom do you call angel now?[c]. Lonely Lake[d]. Two Arrangements for Blue Streak Ensemble[d]
[c]**Sandra Simon** *sop* [b]**Daniel Silver** *cl*
[b]**Maia Quartet;** [ad]**Blue Streak Ensemble**
Naxos American Classics Ⓑ 8 559763 (58' • DDD)

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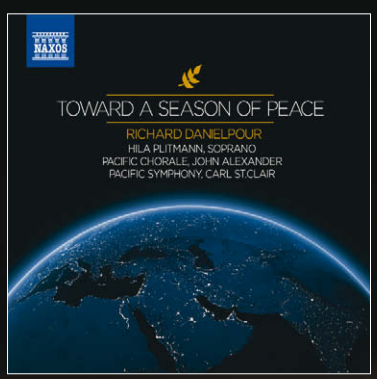



## GLIÈRE: SYMPHONY NO. 3



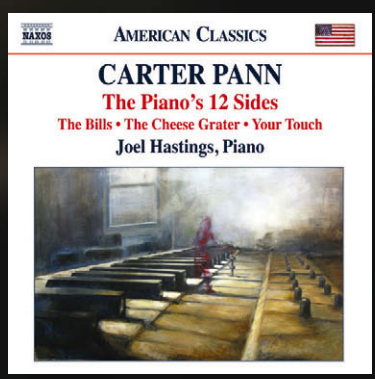

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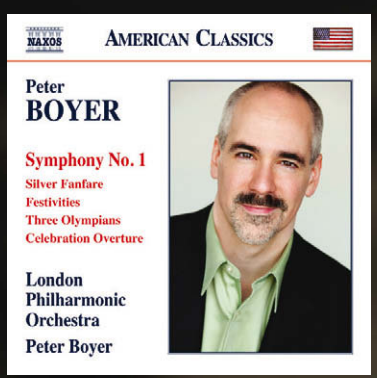

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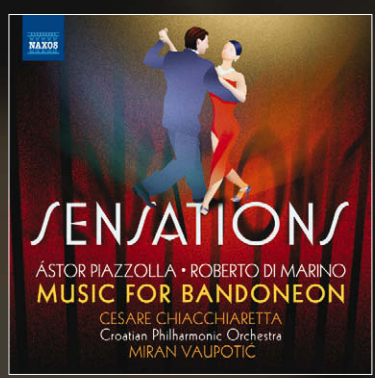

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Naxos's second recording of the music of Margaret Brouwer begins with the post-event traumatic stress disorder of *Shattered Glass* and the Clarinet Quintet, each tonally confused over a serial grid, always doing whatever it takes to make the instruments sound good. Sometimes, after repeated listenings, her music turns darker than it sounded at first; but generally Brouwer's absorbing, good-sounding flow of large-scale narrative structure, infused with her attractively elusive sense of melody, tends to separate itself as a splendid physical entity on its own from the deep personal conflicts the composer was wrestling with. Even without the back story, for example, the Clarinet Quintet is clearly a work of masterful intent; the command with which Brouwer creates and develops an evolving relationship between the clarinet alongside and intertwined with the strings ranges so freely in mood and colour that it would be fascinating to follow with the score. After Sandra Simon sings the exquisitely sad *Whom do you call an angel now?*, to a David Adam poem, Blue Streak Ensemble play their signature back-to-nature piece *Lonely Lake* before ending with the glowing ambience of Bach and Debussy arrangements.

The playing is superlative throughout and the recordings are of audiophile quality. The members of Blue Streak Ensemble were recruited from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where Brouwer teaches composition. Their flexible instrumentation of piano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion and piano gives the music they play, whether it has been written for them or arranged, a definite sense of things happening.

**Laurence Vittes**

## Burton

Symphony No 2, 'Ariel'

**Diane Curry** *mez* **Stephen Dickson** *bar* **Syracuse Symphony Orchestra / Christopher Keene**

Bridge Ⓕ BRIDGE9436 (51' • ADD)

Recorded 1978

From Peters International ● PLE128




Stephen Douglas Burton set a gargantuan task for himself when he endeavoured to create his Symphony No 2. Inspired by Mahler's masterpieces in the genre, the American composer conceived a five-movement work for large orchestra and solo voice (or voices). The score has the subtitle *Ariel*, after the poem by Sylvia Plath, whose texts provide the dramatic impetus for the entire symphony.

Given Plath's penchant for dark and turbulent subjects, Burton devised a potboiler of a work with equal degrees of ferocity, grandeur and lyricism. The harmonic language is essentially tonal, with subtle use of dissonance and keys that wander from their roots. Plath's verses – not printed, alas, in the booklet-notes – can be difficult to discern when the singers are competing with orchestral clamour but the vocal lines vividly convey the poems' anguished emotions.

The Bridge Records disc is a remaster of the original 1978 LP performance, a Peters International release, by the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra under Christopher Keene. It is a striking account that gives full vent to Burton's spectrum of orchestral colours and vocal incarnations of Plath's tortured narratives. Be prepared for venom, especially in the fourth movement, 'Daddy', in which a young girl's anger at her dead father is almost too personal to bear.

Burton assigned the vocal parts to either low male or female voice, or both. The Syracuse performance goes the last route, with mezzo-soprano Diane Curry and baritone Stephen Dickson dividing the material to fervent effect. It is poignant to hear the magnificent artistry of Dickson, who died in 1991 at age 40.

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Colina

Requinauts

**Annie Gil** *mez* **Nicholas Mulroy** *ten* **Royal Scottish National Chorus and Orchestra / Ira Levin**

Fleur de Son Ⓕ FDS58029 (58' • DDD)




The 14 sections of Michael Colina's *Requinauts* mix Catholic liturgy with settings of Rumi, Dylan Thomas and Auden according to a passionate personal undercurrent seeking faith and release. The resulting mix of exotic, eclectic and original styles seems always striving to musically illuminate the composer's stated intention, 'to comprehend the frightening notion of death'. Colina claims to have self-constructed the word 'Requinauts' along the lines of 'Argonauts'; in Colina's case, meaning seekers of 'peace, harmony or repose', even when, as in this case, repose requires two soloists and a big chorus and orchestra. Conducted courageously by Ira Levin, the large cast and crew experience and survive a succession of musical adventures which, despite their spiritual mission, frequently glitter and glow irresistibly in a Yellow Brick Road way.

The voyage otherwise is frequently a disturbingly film noir one, as in 'The Reed Song', a radiant tenor aria of Verdian intensity and eloquence accompanied by xylophones and celesta, blending with the chorus joined by basses singing low audiophile notes. The brilliant heraldic fanfares which open the following track, 'And death shall have no dominion', affirm the theatrical sense of Colina's ear. The recording was made at Henry Wood Hall in Glasgow and has an impressively spacious feel, balanced well with the chorus and spread broadly across the back of the sound stage. There is outstanding definition and timbral accuracy in the deep bassoons, cellos and bass, and overall the splendid Royal Scottish National Orchestra is recorded with tremendous clarity and effortless dynamic range.

**Laurence Vittes**

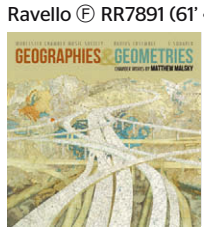
## Malsky

'Geographies & Geometries – Chamber Works'

Archipelago of Regrets[a]. -42.489° 108.756° (Elegy)[a]. Escaping the Delta[b]. Same River Twice[c]. Subtending the Right Angle[d]

**[a]Worcester Chamber Music Society; [b]C-Squared; [cd]Radius Ensemble / [d]Jeffrey Means**

Ravello Ⓕ RR7891 (61' • DDD)




Composer Matthew Malsky makes his second appearance on disc with a 25-year retrospective headlined by *-42.489° 108.756°*, an astounding elegy for two violas, whose nerdy title and gnarly content could make it Sheldon Cooper's theme song on *The Big Bang Theory*. And while the pieces on this disc aren't really computer-generated, they are conceptually engineered to increasingly small tolerances, and at times they sound very pleasantly that way.

From its arresting tremolo start, *-42.489° 108.756°* (conveniently subtitled 'Elegy'), is all that an elegy for two violas can be: edgy and languorous, tormented and tormenting, fashioned in the form of a palindrome but with an unpalindromic surprise at the end. There is a similar sense of freedom though

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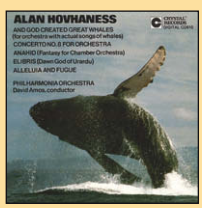
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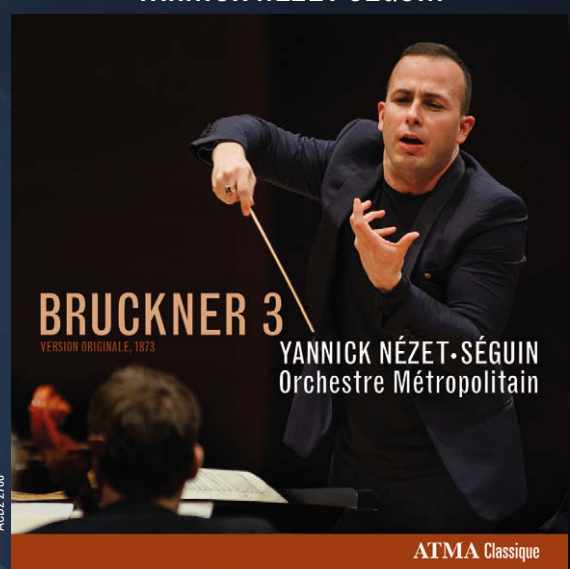
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more out of reach in *Escaping the Delta*, for flute and cello, inspired by blues legend Robert Johnson.

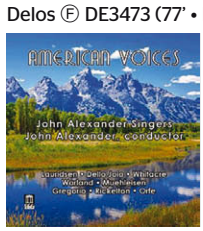
Malsky, a professor of music at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, invests in his materials elements of actual human personality such as flair, impulse and even fantasy, as when halfway through *Same River Twice* a chirping of woodland sounds emerges suddenly, from nowhere. In *Subtending the Right Angle*, Malsky extracts the DNA of a vast Euclidean proof and lets the Radius Ensemble conducted by Jeffrey Means have at it in their own classical music/cool jazz way.

Malsky's more modest success in *Archipelago of Regrets*, for piano trio, comes from earnest intentions and honest means. He captures the sounds piano trios like to make in domestic settings like the dinner table or the living room, with even the intimation of a roar.

**Laurence Vittes**

## 'American Voices'

**Dello Joio** The Bluebird[a]. Song of the Open Road[a] **Gregorio** Love, thricewise **Lauridsen** Chanson éloignée. O love be fed with apples while you may[a] **Muehleisen** Snow (The King's Trumpeter)[b]. When all is done[b]. Two River Nocturnes **Orfe** Fire! **Rickelton** Pentecost **Warland** Always Singing **Whitacre** Little Birds[a]. Water Night **John Alexander Singers / John Alexander** with [b]**Barry Perkins** *tpt* [a]**David Clemensen** *pf*
Delos Ⓕ DE3473 (77' • DDD)




'American Voices,' the title of the newest recording from the John Alexander Singers, the professional chamber choir of the Pacific Chorale, refers both to the ensemble and to the composers. All of them have reason to be proud. The disc is a splendid compendium of songs that soar and vibrate with fresh appeal.

The music is programmed in four categories: 'On the Beauty of Song'; 'On Love and Loss'; 'On Nature'; and 'On the Adventure of Life'. Each song makes a vivid impression through deft setting of text and imaginative unfolding and interweaving of vocal lines. A model in this regard is John Orfe's *Fire!*, in its world-premiere recording. Responding to the text by Langston Hughes, which is in the form of a spiritual, Orfe shapes a work of great expressive intensity. The two superb soloists are bass Carver Cossey and soprano Maria Cristina Navarro.

But everything presented here seizes the ear, from two songs apiece by Norman Dello Joio, Morten Lauridsen and Eric Whitacre to four by John Muehleisen (two featuring trumpeter Barry Perkins) and pieces by Joseph Gregorio, Michael Rickelton and Dale Warland. Dello Joio's *The Bluebird* twitters with lilting charm, while Muehleisen's *When all is done* applies stirring choral shadings to a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar about the anguish of slavery, its lonely trumpet solo complementing the ensemble's impassioned lines.

As led by their Artistic Director, the John Alexander Singers bring exceptional finesse, cohesion and clarity to this diverse repertoire. David Clemensen is the sensitive pianist in several selections.

**Donald Rosenberg**

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# THE SCENE

San Diego returns from the brink with La bohème, a Haydn festival at Stanford University, Herbert Blomstedt conducts Bruckner's Ninth in Los Angeles, Previn's A Streetcar Named Desire in Kentucky

## SAN DIEGO, CA

**San Diego Opera**

**La bohème (Jan 24 – Feb 1)**

After almost closing its doors for good last season for financial reasons, the San Diego community and donors rallied to save this opera company, which can now celebrate its 50th season in 2015. The first of three productions is Puccini's ever-popular *La bohème*, a good way to start; this was the first opera the company ever produced back in 1965. The vibrant young cast includes Alyson Cambridge as Mimì, Harold Meers as Rodolfo, Sara Gartland as Musetta and Morgan Smith as Marcello.

**sdopera.com**

## LOS ANGELES, CA

**Los Angeles Philharmonic**

**Late masterworks of Mozart and Bruckner (Jan 30 – Feb 1)**

Mozart's sublime Piano Concerto No 27 happened to be the composer's last piano concerto and it's said to be one of his most personal expressions. Here the soloist is one of the world's great Mozart interpreters, Richard Goode. This work is coupled with Bruckner's mighty Symphony No 9. Although unfinished, it offers a journey into a gorgeous soundscape (with the *Adagio* serving as the finale). Leading the Los Angeles Philharmonic from the podium is the venerable conductor Herbert Blomstedt, whose acclaimed survey of the complete Bruckner symphonies with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra was recently released by Querstand (11/13).

**laphil.com**

## NEW YORK, NY

**Orpheus Chamber Orchestra**

**Augustin Dumay (Feb 6, 7)**

A characteristically thrilling programme from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra features the French violinist Augustin Dumay performing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. The concert opens with music reaching back to the Baroque era with a suite from Rameau's opera *Les Boréades*, then comes up to date with a world premiere work by the Brooklyn-based composer Timo Andres, the culmination of an Orpheus commission fired by the question: what defines the American spirit? The youthful spirit of a contemporary composer perhaps finds its Classical counterpoint in the final piece of the programme: Schubert's Symphony No 5, which pays tribute to the symphonic conventions of the 1780s.

**orpheusnyc.org**

## EVENT OF THE MONTH



Kirill Gerstein will play Shostakovich in Philly

## PHILADELPHIA, PA

**Philadelphia Orchestra**

**St Petersburg Festival (Jan 15-30)**

This three-week-long festival in January celebrates four Russian masters, with repertoire familiar and unfamiliar that emerged by way of St Petersburg. Week one begins with Glazunov's 'Winter' from *The Seasons*, and Suites Nos 1 and 2 from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, as well as his Symphony No 5. Week two brings the music of Rachmaninov to the fore, including Stokowski's orchestral version of the famous Prelude in C sharp minor and Symphony No 2. As a contemporary complement, there's Mark-Anthony Turnage's Piano Concerto (with Marc-André Hamelin as soloist). The final week focuses on Shostakovich, featuring his Piano Concerto No 2, perhaps the composer's most cheerful work, here performed by the tremendous Russian pianist Kirill Gerstein.

**philorch.org**

## DALLAS, TX

**Dallas Symphony Orchestra**

**Brahms with Bronfman (Feb 12-15)**

Last season, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra presented Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2, with Hélène Grimaud as soloist. This season, the orchestra dials the clock back 22 years to Brahms's Piano Concerto No 1, the composer's first large-scale orchestral work, completed in 1858. This time the soloist is Yefim Bronfman. The concert ends with Richard Strauss's thunderous *Ein Heldenleben*, an autobiographical tone-poem in six parts that allows every part of the orchestra to shimmer and shake. Jaap van Zweden conducts.

**mydso.com**

## STANFORD, CA

**Stanford Philharmonia Orchestra et al**

**Haydn: Patronage & Enlightenment (Feb 13-15)**

Stanford Live – the primary presenter of the arts at Stanford University – is determined to keep the arts at the heart of this Silicon Valley campus. To that end, it's launching several high-concept new series this season, including Live Context: Arts + Ideas. The first three concerts in this series are entitled 'Haydn: Patronage & Enlightenment' and promise to be an in-depth investigation of culture and the arts in the late 18th century, exploring a range of Haydn's music. The Stanford Philharmonia Orchestra, Stanford Chamber Strings, Stanford Chamber Chorale and St Lawrence String Quartet are all part of this collaborative project.

**live.stanford.edu**

## LOUISVILLE, KY

**Kentucky Opera**

**A Streetcar Named Desire (Feb 13, 15)**

André Previn's lush, jazz-inflected opera, based on Tennessee Williams's most famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, premiered in 1998 at the San Francisco Opera. Thanks to its moody, atmospheric score with movie-like tropes, and its powerful themes, the opera remains popular. This presentation by Kentucky Opera features a youthful, talented cast of singers: soprano Maria Kanyova stars as Blanche DuBois with Wes Mason as the virile Stanley Kowalski, *Streetcar* is directed by José Maria Condemi and conducted by Joseph Mechavich.

**kyopera.org**

**Previews by Damian Fowler**

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCOBORGGREVE

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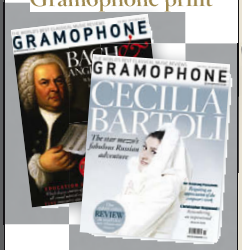

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# The importance of Christmas music

Christmas music, usually in the form of carols (or what we generally refer to as carols), is perhaps the classical music most heard, by the most people. (By 'Christmas music' I'm willfully ignoring the infuriatingly ubiquitous pop songs of the genre, which are already serenading shoppers as I write this in mid-November). The reasons are many, and foremost among them is that the music is often wonderful.

Many carols are of course from the 19th century, even if the tunes are older, and evoke for us the kind of Christmas which owes far more to Dickens than a Middle-Eastern nativity. But even if they do, what of it? Our great churches mostly draw on classical antiquity or Gothic architecture for inspiration, rather than the biblical Holy Land, and are no less inspiring for it. If holly, ivy, candles and choruses best communicate the Christmas message of peace, love and hope, then so be it. Another reason is that, more than any other time, Christmas causes us to reflect on these things collectively, and there are precious few shared, collective experiences in society today. And entwined with all that, like tinsel around a tree, is nostalgia, for childhood, for family and friends present and past. All this somehow places us in touching distance of something we may not fully understand, but know to be good. And few things get us there so well as the likes of *Once in Royal* echoing in a chapel otherwise holding its breath, or *In the Bleak Midwinter*, leading us from the foul winds outside towards a moving meditation on the humility of love.



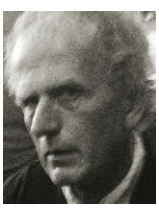


I've digressed slightly, but only to ponder the popularity of Christmas music, for it serves another important role, too, for those of us who love classical music, specifically here choral music. It finds an audience far beyond the stalls or pews of those who normally hear it. There are few occasions when classical music is afforded the attention of wider society: the BBC Proms is one, and I might suggest our annual *Gramophone* Awards does its bit too. But nothing rivals Christmas in this regard: the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's, Cambridge, most of all perhaps, when measured in sheer numbers of listeners. But even more important than this are those who might find themselves actually at a service, joining in carols, but between that, hearing a choir singing something complex and beautiful, perhaps for the first time. Or marvelling at an invigorating organ voluntary shaking the stone work, while the congregation becomes slowly aware of the smell of mince pies and mulled wine awaiting at the back.

Music needs to take all opportunities to reach out, and we all have a role to play. So turn on the radio when Nine Lessons and Carols is broadcast for your Christmas visitors less acquainted with choral music to hear. Buy them one of our recommended Christmas recordings as a gift. Invite a friend along to a carol service – and who knows where it will lead? At the very least, you can enjoy sharing stories of the year past over the mince pies and mulled wine, and that's part of the spirit of the season too. A very happy Christmas to you all.

**martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com**

## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



**PAUL GRIFFITHS**, who provides this month's Contemporary Composers feature, says of his subject: 'I've been a Gerald Barry fan for years – certainly from the time he sat firmly on his hands after a performance he had no desire at all to applaud. Just listen: there's nobody like him.'



'Having been to many of her performances in the theatre, it was a delight to meet Emmanuelle Haïm,' says **RICHARD LAWRENCE**, author of Musician and the Score. 'Her passionate enthusiasm for Handel has inspired me to seek out her recording of Arcadian Duets, a couple of which were recycled for *Messiah*.'



'As a composer, it is always enormously interesting to reflect on other composers' experiences and points of view,' writes **IVAN MOODY**, author of our feature about modern carols. 'The diversity I encountered while writing about contemporary music for Christmas was unexpectedly fascinating.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Mike Ashman • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Duncan Druce • Adrian Edwards Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Iain Fenlon • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Caroline Gill • Edward Greenfield • David Gutman • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Tess Knighton • Richard Lawrence • Ivan March • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • Ken Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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**EDITORIAL**
**Phone** 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
**email** gramophone@markallengroup.com
**EDITOR AND PUBLISHER** Martin Cullingford
**DEPUTY EDITOR** Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
**REVIEWS EDITOR** Andrew Mellor / 020 7501 6367
**ONLINE AND FEATURES EDITOR** James McCarthy / 020 7501 6366
**SUB-EDITOR** David Threasher / 020 7501 6370
**ART DIRECTOR** Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
**PICTURE EDITOR** Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 7501 6369
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**EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR** Libby McPhee
**THANKS TO** Marija Đurić Speare, Hannah Nepil
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** James Jolly

**ADVERTISING**
**Phone** 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
**email** gramophone.ads@markallengroup.com
**SALES MANAGER**
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**SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES**
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**PUBLISHING**
**Phone** 020 7738 5454
**GROUP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER** Luca Da Re / 020 7501 6362
**MARKETING EXECUTIVE** Julian Halse / 020 7501 6372
**DIGITAL AND MARKETING DIRECTOR** Matthew Cianfarani
**DATA AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR** Tom Pollard
**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR** Richard Hamshere / 01722 716997
**PRODUCTION MANAGER** Jon Redmayne
**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR** Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997
**SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER** Chris Hoskins / 01722 716997
**PUBLISHING DIRECTOR** Siân Harrington
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER** Ben Allen
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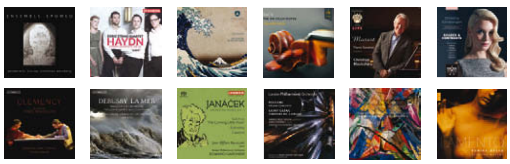
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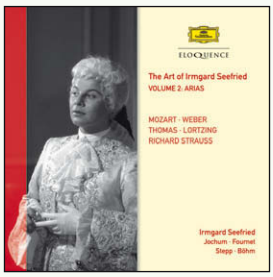

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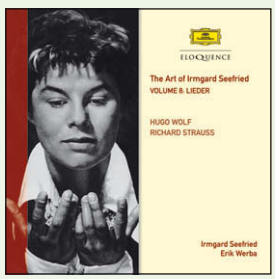

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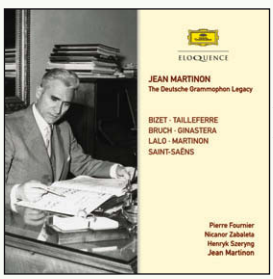

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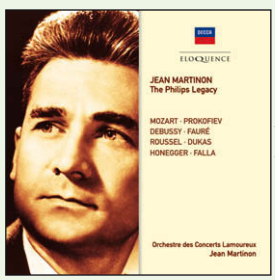

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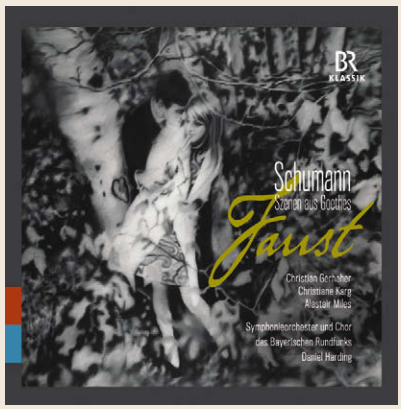
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# GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



RECORDING OF THE MONTH




**SCHUMANN**
Szenen aus Goethes Faust
**Soloists; Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Daniel Harding**
BR-Klassik Ⓕ ②
900122
▸ **PETER QUANTRILL'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 40**

Daniel Harding conducts with a superb sense of pace, weight and colour, perfectly supporting his equally fine singers in a really impressive live recording.




**GRIME** Night Songs
**Hallé Soloists & Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder, Jamie Phillips**
NMC Ⓕ NMCD199
Contrasting and compelling works which all bear the distinctive voice of this young composer, here championed with real commitment by the Hallé (and, indeed, NMC).
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 47




**VIVALDI**
'Concerti per flauto'
**Maurice Steger** *rec/flautino* **I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis**
Harmonia Mundi
Ⓕ HMC90 2190
Transfixing recorder virtuosity allied with lively orchestral support, while in slow movements they achieve a delightful serenity. ▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 56



**'VISIONS FUGITIVES'**
**Camerata Nordica / Terje Tønnesen**
BIS Ⓕ BIS2126
A superb disc, defined throughout by brilliantly vivid and (when called on to be so) dramatic string sounds in the wide variety of approaches called upon by these four composers.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 59




**HAYDN**
String Quartets, Op 20
**Doric Quartet**
Chandos
Ⓑ ② CHAN10831
It's an age blessed with superb young string quartets and the Doric are among them. Instinctive grasp of the music and a very clear joy in performing it are evident throughout.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 67



**LANGGAARD**
String Quartets, Vol 3
**Nightingale Quartet**
Dacapo Ⓕ 6 220577
*Gramophone*'s current Young Artists of the Year complete their exploration of Langgaard in style, leaving those who have followed them on the journey much the richer for it.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 67




**'LA FAUVETTE PASSERINETTE'**
**Peter Hill** *pf*
Delphian Ⓕ DCD34141
A fascinating recital, built around a Messiaen premiere, from a pianist who fully inhabits the sound worlds of his assembled 20th- (and 21st-) century composers.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 80



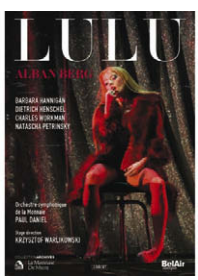

**RAMEAU**
Pièces de clavecin
**Mahan Esfahani** *hpd*
Hyperion
Ⓕ ② CDA68071/2
'Unfailing wit, affection, fluency and pacing', qualities our critic attributes to Esfahani: entirely justified praise for this ever-impressive harpsichordist for the modern age.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 82




**HOWELLS** 'When first thine eies unveil'
**Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir / Paul Spicer**
Somm Ⓕ SOMMCD0140
Rarities and premieres – a new insight into Howell's work. These and the other works on the disc are all sung with a moving intimacy and reflectiveness.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 88




**HARTMANN**
Simplicius Simplicissimus
**Soloists; Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / Markus Stenz**
Challenge Classics
Ⓕ ② CC72637
A powerful piece, given an astonishing sense of drama and force by Markus Stenz, the rich orchestral playing every bit as vivid as the singing. ▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 102




**DVD/BLU-RAY**
**BERG** Lulu
**Soloists; La Monnaie, Brussels / Paul Daniel**
Bel Air Classiques Ⓕ ② DVD BAC109
Hugo Shirley argues the case for this performance on the strength of Barbara Hannigan's irresistible, remarkable performance as Berg's tragic protagonist.
▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 100




**REISSUE/ARCHIVE**
**TAVENER**
Akhmatova Requiem
**BBC SO / Gennadi Rozhdestvensky**
NMC Ⓕ NMCD208
Our critic asks us to consider this a masterpiece: this Proms performance offers fine advocacy. ▸ REVIEW ON PAGE 91

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# FOR THE RECORD



Grigory Sokolov will allow selected live recordings to be released by DG

## Grigory Sokolov signs exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon

Deutsche Grammophon has announced the exclusive signing of one of the world's most enigmatic pianists, Grigory Sokolov. Sokolov, who according to DG's press release 'refuses to play pianos that are more than five years old' and who doesn't make studio recordings, will permit DG to release a 2008 recital from the Salzburg Festival in January 2015 featuring works by Chopin and Mozart. Mark Wilkinson, President of Deutsche Grammophon, said, 'The wait is finally over, as we warmly welcome Maestro Sokolov to the Yellow Label, and herald a new and rare album release. Inspiring complete devotion from his extraordinary army of fans, many of whom aim to attend every single one of his extraordinary concerts, he is an "anti-star" par excellence. Critics and pianophiles alike have known of his work for many years, and we now want to connect the broadest possible audience with this life-affirming, revelatory and enigmatic artist.'

Sokolov, who rarely grants interviews, spoke to Bryce Morrison in a fascinating interview for *Gramophone* in 1997, in which he described his views on recording, and which may give an indication of the approach to the new release on DG.

'The business of making records has worried me so much and I'm only just beginning to come to terms with it or, rather, I've found a solution. I'm delighted to say that I've made my last "studio" disc. From now on everything will be live, all or nothing, selected from a mountain of tapes waiting for me in Paris. I cause lots of problems because I don't believe in editing and splicing – a bit of this, a bit of that. I never play anything the same way twice, the acoustics vary from hall to hall and so do the offstage noises of my audiences. My producers and engineers tear their hair out on my behalf but I refuse to compromise.'




## Dickon Stainer appointed President of Global Classics at Universal

Max Hole, Chairman and CEO of Universal Music Group (which includes Decca Classics and Deutsche Grammophon in its stable of classical labels) has promoted Dickon Stainer to a new position within Universal: President and CEO of Global Classics.

Stainer is a great-great-grandson of the composer John Stainer and as a child was head chorister at Ely Cathedral. He spent four years playing in the National Youth Orchestra of Great

### Gijs Leenaars to replace Simon Halsey in Berlin

The Berlin Radio Choir has announced that Gijs Leenaars will replace Simon Halsey as its Principal Conductor and Artistic Director. He will begin his five-year contract on August 1, 2015.

Since 2012 Leenaars has been Principal Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Choir; he will not be extending that contract beyond 2015, so he can concentrate entirely on his new job. In May 2015 Halsey will become Conductor Laureate of the Berlin choir, which has enjoyed a particularly close relationship with Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic under his leadership.

### Julian Rachlin named Principal Guest of Royal Northern Sinfonia

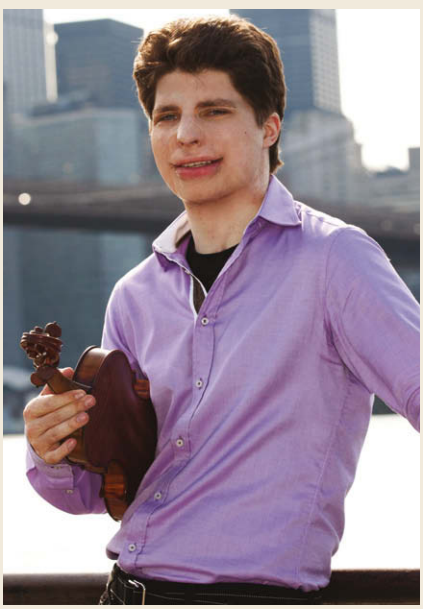
Following its appointment earlier this year of a Principal Conductor better known as a pianist, Lars Vogt, the Royal Northern Sinfonia now completes its artistic team with a Principal Guest Conductor better known as a violinist, Julian Rachlin.

Rachlin made his conducting debut with the orchestra in October 2013 and has since also conducted the Israel Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

As violinist, Rachlin was just 14 years old when he appeared as a soloist with the Vienna Philharmonic, still the youngest soloist to have appeared with that orchestra.

Britain before studying music at Cambridge University. In 1991 Stainer ran the marketing campaign surrounding the video recording of Pavarotti's concert in Hyde Park, London; he went on to market The Three Tenors for Warner Music.

Stainer rose to become Managing Director and then President of Decca Records Group. Decca Classics was named *Gramophone*'s Label of the Year in 2013 while under his stewardship. He was also an Executive Producer on the film *Quartet* (2012), which stars Maggie Smith, Pauline Collins, Billy Connolly and Tom Courtenay as a group of long-retired opera singers who decide to perform together one last time.



Can Augustin Hadelich win at Carnegie Hall?

## New Warner Music Prize offers $100,000 to classical musicians

Warner Music has announced a new prize, supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation (which is headed by Len Blavatnik, an American industrialist and philanthropist), which will award $100,000 to a musician aged between 18 and 35.

In its inaugural year, the prize will be presented in association with Carnegie Hall and the winner will be selected from those musicians who are presenting recitals at Carnegie Hall during the 2014-15 concert season. These include violinist Augustin Hadelich, mezzo Jamie Barton and pianist Behzod Abduraimov.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROSALIE O'CONNOR. MATS BÄCKER ILLUSTRATION: TIM KIRBY

## Clarinettist and conductor Martin Fröst signs to Sony Classical

Clarinettist Martin Fröst has signed an exclusive recording contract with Sony Classical. The first release will feature Fröst as both soloist and conductor with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and will be released in January 2016.

Sony Classical's President Bogdan Roscic said: 'Seeing and hearing Martin Fröst is one of the strongest experiences classical music offers at the moment. Audiences around the world react to it with an enthusiasm bordering on euphoria. Martin is able to convey an overwhelming sense of being taken closer to the music's essence and has found ways of expressing that which are quite unique in our business.'

Fröst is, of course, no stranger to *Gramophone*'s readers: his most recent recording of Brahms's chamber music for BIS was named an Editor's Choice in the July 2014 issue, and critic Nalen Anthoni noted: 'Sensuous beauty and taut sinew mingle for an interpretation from five soloists whose fastidious attention to internal balance and every musical detail result in sovereign excellence, in a sovereign recording.'

In July, Lindsay Kemp spoke to Fröst about Brahms's Clarinet Quintet and Fröst explained his special relationship with Brahms's music. 'My father, who was a doctor, played viola and loved Brahms. I first heard the Quintet on a recording my father bought me, and my first impression was that it is pretty introverted. As a kid you don't really have boundaries, so I was totally blown away by the emotion of it.'



Unique: clarinettist Martin Fröst

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### PODCASTS

To mark the 150th anniversary of Richard Strauss's birth, *Gramophone*'s Editor-in-Chief, James Jolly, and Strauss specialist Hugo Shirley discuss the composer's life and music, with musical excerpts from Decca and DG.

### NEWS & FEATURES

In a special online session report, Caroline Gill goes to Westminster Abbey to witness the tense and exhilarating recording sessions for 'Music for Remembrance', the new recording featuring Duruflé's Requiem by the Choir of Westminster Abbey.



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King's College Choir have commissioned 34 new works for their Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in recent years

# CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS RENEWED

We live in a golden age of Christmas carol composition. **Ivan Moody** considers the challenges of writing new seasonal music and the ways in which they are met by today's composers

Almost a decade ago, I threw up my hands in despair at the triteness of recorded Christmas fare and decided to write a carol. I did so, and faxed it to a conductor friend as soon as it was finished. Its first performance took place that very Christmas at the Chapel of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, and I have written a new carol every year since then. Other composers have clearly felt the same frustrations, with the result that the sheer quantity of new music for Christmas produced over the past few years is quite extraordinary.

*'The sheer quantity of new music for Christmas produced over the past few years is quite extraordinary'*

Negativity is, of course, not a good place to start: the Christmas period especially demands a positive stance, a new and optimistic contribution intended to stand out from, but in some way also be a part of, the traditional offerings. It is refreshing to see, then, just how much music has been written in recent years that has not only refreshed the repertoire but has remained part of it on account of its high quality. The *locus classicus* for new seasonal music in Great Britain is, of course, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge, for whose unique format 34 new works, including carols and postludes for organ, have been commissioned to date.

Those commissioned include not only composers whose names resonate through the world of choral music, such as Jonathan Harvey (*Angels*, 1994), Arvo Pärt (*Bogoroditse Devo*, 1990), the late Sir John Tavener (*Away in a Manger*, 2005) and Judith Weir (*Illuminare Jerusalem*, 1985), but also composers who may seem less obvious choices but who have contributed works of great originality, such as Sir Harrison Birtwistle (*The Gleam*, 2003), Mark-Anthony Turnage (*Misere nobis*, 2006) and John Woolrich (*Spring in Winter*, 2001). Such commissions often bring to light surprising texts, such as Dominic Muldowney's *Mary*, written for the 2008 service, which sets a poem by Bertolt Brecht, and they have not always gone to British composers; 2010 brought *Christmas Carol* from the renowned Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara, and 2012 a setting of Tennyson's *Ring out, wild bells* by the Australian composer Carl Vine. Such specially commissioned works naturally receive a great amount of exposure on account of the prestige of the King's service, which is broadcast live every year on Christmas Eve, and then go on to become part of the standard repertoire; but it is also the case that the commissioning of new music for the Advent and Christmas seasons by choirs of all types and standards is, happily, widespread.

Returning to King's for the moment, Arvo Pärt is, of course, in many senses an obvious name to seek to commission when thinking of new seasonal works, so prolific has he been as a composer of sacred music. But there is always an element of

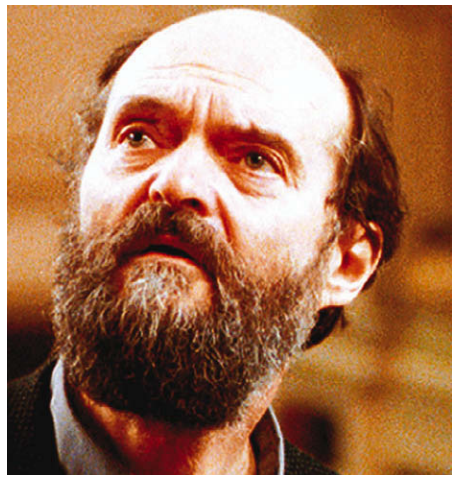
PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK RUTTER



Gabriel Jackson engages with carol tradition...



... James MacMillan tries to ignore it...



...while Arvo Pärt always brings an element of surprise

surprise with Pärt: *Bogoroditse Devo* is in reality not a Christmas piece at all, merely a setting of the Orthodox version of the *Ave Maria*. But what a setting! It positively radiates joy, and has gradually become an established feature in Christmas programming, the Slavonic text seeming not to have proved much of an obstacle for Anglophone choirs, and, unsurprisingly, it is also in widespread use in the Orthodox world.

The late Sir John Tavener set Christmas texts a number of times during his life, and of course *The Lamb*, from 1982, has become a kind of honorary Christmas carol. In later years he set several traditional carol texts, including *Rocking* and *There is no rose*, and some of these found their way into the remarkable extended carol sequence *Ex Maria Virgine*, commissioned by Timothy Brown and the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, in 2005. This is a substantial work, setting texts taken from a wide variety of sources, though many of them are medieval, and the composer's settings are by turns meditative and exuberantly dramatic. A typical Tavener touch is his insertion into the final carol, *Unto us is born a Son*, of salutations to the Virgin Mary in Greek and Arabic.

*'Atmosphere is something that is considered of great importance in programming choral concerts at this time of year'*

One can hardly avoid discussing Eric Whitacre in the context of Christmas choral music, but it is often not realised that Whitacre has in fact avoided setting religious texts – the recent *Sainte Chappelle* for The Tallis Scholars is a remarkable and brilliant exception, but even then the sacred text is a quotation within the poem by Charles Anthony Silvestri – preferring to concentrate instead on evocations of mood, something that could in itself be said to be part of the way Christmas has expanded beyond the Church. Probably the best known of Whitacre's works, *Lux aurumque* sets a short poem by Edward Esch, translated into Latin by Silvestri, and was written originally for the Master Chorale at Tampa Bay. Though it clearly refers to Christmas ('angels sing softly / to the new-born babe'), it is really concerned with the evocation of 'Light, / warm and heavy as pure gold' – it is a word-painting, skilfully conveying an atmosphere, and the massive popularity of the work proves that 'atmosphere' is something that is considered of great importance in programming choral concerts at this time of year. *The Chelsea Carol*, a powerful work for choir and organ, is actually a hymn to Wisdom by Silvestri, written for the Choirs of Birmingham-Southern College, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of its own Service of Lessons and Carols, while *little tree*, for choir and piano, is a setting of a poem by ee cummings in praise of a Christmas tree, written at breakneck speed for the San Francisco Symphony Chorus in 1996.

Whitacre's avoidance of liturgical or genuinely paraliturgical texts is unusual; but on the other hand, the use of such texts by composers who are not conventional believers is not. Such is the case, famously, of John Rutter, and it is also true of Francis Pott and Gabriel Jackson, both of whom are steeped in the traditions of the Church of England but are not practising Christians. Indeed, Pott says that he is a 'sort of compositional Richard Holloway [the former Bishop of Edinburgh who latterly adopted an agnostic worldview] these days', but he has a keen sense of the importance of tradition when he is writing. 'Most texts applicable in this context,' he says, 'will have been set before, sometimes by major composers and in pieces which have come to be regarded as unimprovable classics. In a case like my setting of *Balulalow*, the impossibility of ignoring Britten's setting in the *Ceremony of Carols* arose from the very necessity to ensure that I did something different.'

The whole question of texts is of fundamental importance, too. While Rutter is happy to write his own texts in a modern idiom, and Birtwistle's carol for King's set a contemporary poem by Stephen Plaice describing the harsh reality of the birth in the stable rather than any conventional celebratory sentiment, if one turns to extant Christmas texts one is obliged to deal with questions of cultural resonance. Unlike Carl Vine, with his Tennyson setting, or Jonathan Rathbone, whose setting of Hardy's *The Oxen* has become established in the repertoire, and who has arranged vast swathes of the traditional carol repertoire, Francis Pott finds that Victorian or Edwardian English texts, for example, do not suit his purpose. 'By contrast,' he says, 'medieval English is sufficiently dissociate in time and cultural resonance to avoid seeming mismatched to new musical settings, provided one approaches it carefully and gets it right (see again Britten and the *Ceremony of Carols*, where his instinctive feeling for word-setting captures time and again what has become seemingly a definitively right way of doing such things). The same applies even more to Latin, and at least equally to macaronic medieval verse alternating both languages.' Thus it is that Pott, in common with a large number of composers, has had recourse to well-known medieval texts such as *Lullay my liking*, *There is no rose of such virtue* and *I sing of a maiden*, all of which provide perfect material for his delicate style of text-setting.

A sense of place and occasion is also extremely important for Pott. As a former lay clerk at Winchester Cathedral, he says that 'imagining them being sung in an appropriate setting' can be a significant part of responding to a Christmas commission. Gabriel Jackson's reaction is not dissimilar: 'I think about other (old or recent) pieces as being in the background of what I am writing, in some way. The personality (as I perceive it) and sound of a liturgical choir, the atmosphere and architecture of its building, the style of worship, have an influence on the piece.' And it is certainly the case that one can hear these elements that make up so much of the traditional repertoire for Christmas in Jackson's work, even as one may also discern a distinct freshness: the compound rhythms of *The Christ Child*, for example, commissioned for King's in 2009, immediately suggest not only a lullaby but the entire repertoire of the medieval English carol. In fact, Jackson has had recourse to such texts more than once, as *Nowell sing we*, commissioned by Truro Cathedral in 2006, and *Ane sang of the birth of Christ*, written for the choir of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, demonstrate. A Christmas carol should, says the composer, 'be simple and direct in manner; it should have a clear and straightforward shape'; it might include 'a verse-and-refrain structure (or, at least, a strong verse structure)…compound metres (with derivatives thereof – 5/8, 7/8…)…a treble solo.' *The Christ Child* corresponds to all these requirements but also turns the final verse, with its dramatic change of key and use of repetition at the end, into a moment of sublime transcendence.



Francis Pott: uses well-known medieval texts

One would expect a composer such as James MacMillan, a practising Roman Catholic whose catalogue includes a large amount of sacred and paraliturgical music, to have written for the Christmas season, and such is the case; but it is interesting that his attitude towards doing so contrasts markedly with that of Pott and Jackson. Though he is contemplating writing a large-scale Christmas work in the future, 'the few pieces I have written so far,' he says, 'were undertaken with only the slightest thought for the tradition. I would try to think freshly when it came to Christmas music – the tradition is too thickly and deeply set, and should probably be ignored!' Challenging words indeed; but the vitality of the result of this approach is evident in the originality of both such an early work as *A child is born in Bethlehem*, from 1978, scored for three-part choir and oboe, and the much more recent *Seinte Mari Moder Milde*, commissioned in 1995 for the King's College Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. It sets words from a 13th-century manuscript from Trinity College, Cambridge, and features dramatic alternations of darkness and light, intimations of Scottish folksong, a freewheeling and adventurous organ part, and an utterly unexpected ending. Both works are successful and accessible because of MacMillan's innate melodic gifts, as well as his feeling for atmospheric colour.

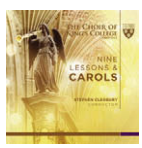
Even more colourful, however, is *Hodie puer nascitur*, a non-liturgical work written for the early music ensemble Las Huelgas and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 2011. This sets a text from one of the 14th-century French-Cypriot antiphons in the Turin manuscript J.II, and also takes its musical cues from there. There is much use of free rhythm, and the percussive, treble-orientated scoring creates a singular and mysteriously beautiful sound world.

The future looks bright for the Christmas carol, then, and initiatives such as the 'A Carol for Christmas' competition in 2012, *The Times* Christmas Carol Competition in 2013, and, this year, the Christmas Carol Composition Competiton organised by the Master Chorale at Tampa Bay, and the BBC Radio 3 *Breakfast* Christmas Carol Competition are proof of this. The winner of the Master Chorale's competition has already been announced – Dale Trumbore's *The Christmas Rose* – but the BBC competition is still running. Unpublished composers are asked to set Susan Hill's poem *Can it be true?*, a joyful depiction of the animal kingdom coming to worship at the manger, and six of the entries will be performed by the BBC Singers live on air on December 16, after which listeners will be asked to vote for a winner.

Obviously, the requirement to set a specific poem may be seen as restrictive, but it was Stravinsky who pointed out that such restrictions are often the kinds of challenges that a composer needs to write good music. The judges are the Master of the Queen's Music, Judith Weir, and the BBC Singers' Chief Conductor, David Hill, both of whom have been, so to speak, instrumental in encouraging the composition of contemporary Christmas music. The tradition not only continues but shines brighter than ever. G

## CONTEMPORARY CAROLS ON DISC

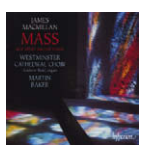
A selection of Christmas works by composers of our time



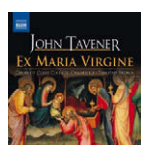
**Gabriel Jackson: The Christ Child**
'Nine Lessons and Carols'
**The Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury**
King's College Ⓢ ②
KGS0001 (12/12)
This glorious recording includes in addition several of the carols commissioned for the service over the years, within the context of the service itself.



**Francis Pott: Balulalow, etc**
In the Heart of Things – Choral Music of Francis Pott
**Grace Davidson** *sop*
**Commotio / Matthew Berry**
Naxos Ⓑ 8 572739 (2/12)
An excellent survey of Pott's choral music, including a number of Christmas works such as *Balulalow* and *A Hymn to the Virgin*, superbly performed by Commotio.



**James MacMillan: Seinte Mari Moder Milde**
MacMillan: Mass and Other Sacred Music
**Choir of Westminster Cathedral / Martin Baker** with **Andrew Reid** *org*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA67219 (6/01)
A selection of MacMillan's sacred music, including *Seinte Mari Moder Milde*, in powerful and idiomatic performances.



**John Tavener: Ex Maria Virgine**
Tavener: Ex Maria Virgine
**Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Timothy Brown**
Naxos Ⓑ 8 572168 (1/09)
A dynamic rendering of Tavener's extensive carol sequence is at the heart of a fine anthology of his music, much of it among his lesser-known work.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOEL GARTHWAITE, HANS VAN DER WOERD, RICHARD H SMITH/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS

# A GARDEN of Baroque voices

**Lindsay Kemp meets conductor William Christie, founder of Les Arts Florissants and a leading light of the early music movement, to talk about his ensemble's past and future**

'Oh, what is the word? I'm losing my English!' Perhaps it is not surprising that William Christie often has to turn to French when talking about Les Arts Florissants. Few would dispute that the vocal and instrumental ensemble he founded in 1979 long ago became the leading force in Baroque music in France, and that Christie is justified in his statement that 'we have, I suppose, become a sort of national treasure'. He himself long ago became a French citizen, and his honours include membership of the Légion d'Honneur and the place in the Académie des Beaux-Arts formerly allotted to Marcel Marceau.

The French word he finally decides on is *pérennisation*, which in English might be given as 'continuation'. Does he mean a succession plan? Well, the 70-year-old American is certainly not thinking about retirement (how many 70-year-old conductors do?), but the future of his group is on his mind. 'When people say to me, for God's sake why don't you give it up, I think, "it's curious, you wouldn't talk to the Cleveland Orchestra in that way; nobody said that to the Schola Cantorum back in the days when they were a beacon of intellectual music-making; you don't say that to the Hallé Orchestra or the Orchestre Colonne". That's to say, what we have here is something institutional. I want Les Arts Florissants to continue for a long time because I think what we're doing is worthwhile.'

*'I want Les Arts Florissants to continue for a long time because I think what we're doing is worthwhile'* – *William Christie*

The *pérennisation* process includes a number of things both present and nearly present, from the group's 'apprentice' schemes Le Jardin des Voix (for voices) and Arts Flos Juniors (for instrumentalists), which have already done much to keep the flow of new talent into the group, to the setting up of a foundation to provide future stability. Christie also places high value on the group's recent installation as an Associate Ensemble at Paris's new concert hall, the Philharmonie, and its strong connections since 2007 with the Historical Performance department at the Juilliard School in New York, which is, he says, 'a big buzz – everyone's saying that once the Juilliard has put its stamp of approval on early music it's really going to take off in New York!'

Then there has been the establishment of two new musical roles, with tenor and longtime prominent member of the group Paul Agnew becoming Associate Musical Director and Associate Conductor (as well as Co-Director of Le Jardin des Voix), and cellist/harpsichordist Jonathan Cohen becoming Associate Conductor. 'We've had many wonderful people in the group before, but there was never an idea that we would try and hold on to them,' says Christie. 'With Paul and Jonny it's different. I met both of them as musicians – Jonny as a cellist in the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Paul as a singer coming to France to sing in major opera productions with us and as a specialised voice-type in other things – and they know me and Les Arts so well. It's taken me a long time to find both of them, but no one seems to have asked so far why we asked two Brits to take these posts. There is a reason, and it's that there's something about the chemistry of my ensemble which is terribly important. We're dealing essentially with French musicians who have been educated in a particular way. There are certain national traits about how the French see themselves in organisations and how they work together, and they're very different from what I grew up with, and what Jonny and Paul grew up with. It seems to me that we have to have this kind of duality, which is one of the reasons we've been a success. We've got a Latin/French temperament in many ways, but then also work habits and a way of regarding colleagues which I think is essentially Anglo-Saxon. We don't talk about it an awful lot, and I have to be careful how I put it, but there is this kind of double personality, a genius in both cultures, which I have enormous admiration for and think is terribly important for the future as well.'

It's true that, as an American arriving in Paris and telling the locals how to do their own music (he once told *Le Figaro* that the French had more cultural baggage than they knew how to deal with and that he was there to help them pick it



Still as busy as ever as he turns 70: William Christie conducting Les Arts Florissants, the ensemble he founded 35 years ago

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHEL SZABO

up), Christie has ruffled the odd French feather over the years. He seems a little hurt by a former LAF member's remark that the group's influence is like an enormous tree under which nothing can grow, but defends himself by pointing to the many artists – including directors Christophe Rousset, Emmanuelle Haïm and Hervé Niquet – who have gone on to great things after working in the group. And it's not as if there wasn't a lot of work to do: 'In 1979 we looked at lots of repertory and some of it was very difficult for us. I chose Charpentier and some of his predecessors and contemporaries because essentially they wrote for the size of ensemble that I had. But it was simple stuff for the most part. Working around that time on our first big Rameau ballet, repertory that really required technique and know-how, with string players who were mostly from the first generation of French Baroque people, was a very different matter, and yes, the playing was gauche. I mean, just working on Rameau string technique, where is the line going? How do you incorporate all these immensely complicated rhythms and ornaments? Thirty years later I can pick up a Rameau one-act ballet, or a piece of difficult Mozart, or a virtuoso Italian piece, and they're in their element! If I had to spend a week working on complicated string accompaniments to airs in vocal pieces back then, now I can hear what I want to hear in two rehearsals. There's even a nonchalance there.'

It was the same, says Christie, when it came to singers. 'When I arrived in Europe in 1970 there were moments when, if you talked too much about vocal repertoire apart from Bach cantatas, people started looking at you as if you were a bit weird. Amsterdam was a very strange place because the harpsichord was king – some of the people who sang then can't any more because their voices were irreparably destroyed by the early music instrumental ayatollahs. And in France it was essentially virgin territory. When I arrived I'd heard a whole load of French 17th-century music recorded by French ensembles in the '60s, and it was like musical Benny Hill! You know, outrageous caricature! You can't really say anything good about it. But today I'm hearing fabulous kids for whom this music is just part of their nature.'

Paul Agnew certainly agrees that Christie's influence has been a positive one: 'Bill has always been a teacher; just look at the people he's brought through!' he exclaims when we meet in Venice, where he is directing LAF in a concert of Monteverdi madrigals amid the gilt and Tintorettos of the Scuola di San Rocco. He doesn't just mean people in the group. 'You know, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson was not an especially well-known singer when she auditioned for Charpentier's *Médee*. We still have her audition tape somewhere, along with everyone else's. By the time she had finished in *Médee*, she had established herself as an extraordinary star. And Bill did that for her! She had the quality all right, but he brought things out in her that she didn't know she had, just as he did for others.'

Agnew has performed the Monteverdi madrigals extensively with LAF in concert, and representative selections from



A benign but watchful presence: William Christie rehearses with the musicians of Les Arts Florissants

each of the eight books are being offered over three separate releases on the group's newly established 'own label', Les Arts Florissants Editions. Other CDs so far have included a well-received Handel *Belshazzar* last year (12/13) and a programme entitled 'Le Jardin de Monsieur Rameau' (7/14), while future ones include more Handel in 'Music for Queen Caroline', and a disc of 17th-century 'airs seriéux et à boire' by Lambert, Charpentier and others. The Monteverdi is the first not to feature Christie, however, so it is perhaps not surprising that, directed by a singer, it should enter new territory for the group in the shape of Monteverdi's earlier books of madrigals. The middle volume, containing madrigals from Books 4, 5 and 6, is the first out. 'These are madrigals which really show what Monteverdi knew about text,' says Agnew. 'I think the box should say it's directed by me and Rita de Letteriis, our voice coach, because we as singers imagine at our peril that Monteverdi started out composing a madrigal with anything other than the poem. So the first thing we do is listen to Rita reading the poem and then we talk about it for a long time, and the talking changes fundamentally how we look at the music so that already by the time we sing it through for the first time we have an idea of what it's saying, and you can get an immediate connection with what Monteverdi was trying to do with the music.'

An interesting side-note on this concern for text comes from René de Ceccatty, the author of the specially commissioned short story that, as in all of Les Arts Florissants Editions' releases, accompanies the Monteverdi disc. De Ceccatty is both a librettist and an expert on Italian Renaissance poetry, but he tells me that listening to Les Arts' performance of the madrigals directly affected him as he wrote. 'I think Paul Agnew and William Christie strike a good balance between the musicological and the hyper-expressive,' he tells me. 'I heard their singing of individual lines as I wrote, and tried to imagine that my character, a modern-day poet herself, could write poetry in this same style.'

But then, text and the 'musicality of language' have always been at the heart of Christie's approach to music-making – that and rigorous preparation. 'Bill's one never to sit on his laurels, someone who is never, ever going to be satisfied,' says Agnew. 'Working with him is breathless, exhausting, amazing, because he constantly wants to push us on. It's serious business, but then it's because we want to get to the position where we can go out onstage thinking "wait till you hear this!"'

'Preparation is important,' agrees Christie. 'You must understand what you're performing, not learn it by rote, and we go through a hell of a lot of preparation that others don't.' But no less important is choosing the right kind of singer, and in this Christie still looks for the same characteristics for a new Jardin des Voix singer today as he did for LAF back in the 1980s. 'First of all you can sense intellectual curiosity. Secondly you sense the desire to communicate. That's something not all singers have – some don't seem to be in the same space as you – but we had it right from the beginning with people like Dominique Visse, Guillemette Laurens and Agnès Mellon. I don't listen to my old recordings much, but when I hear Agnès in *Castor et Pollux*, I'm overcome. I like *bel canto* voices that sound natural and have facility in terms of coloratura. And I like collegiality; I like people who enjoy making music with others. Listening to Joyce DiDonato sing in a quartet, or Sarah Connolly making enormous and successful efforts to sing with others, that's my ideal.'

Last December, watching Les Arts performing the 'airs sérieux et à boire' programme at Wigmore Hall in London,

I was struck by the fact that here was yet another line-up of singers and instrumentalists almost entirely new to me, yet the group's familiar and defining strengths were as much in evidence as ever. From the urgent sense of communication and the sheer ensemble excellence to the lack of self-consciousness with which the mostly young performers seemed to throw themselves into this perfectly judged semi-staged sequence of songs and small-scale vocal ensembles, these were performances as much in the composed but expressively truthful Les Arts mould as any in the past in which you might have seen the likes of Dominique Visse, Véronique Gens, Sandrine Piau, Jill Feldman, Guillemette Laurens, Gérard Lesne, Sophie Daneman, Patricia Petibon, Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, Mark Padmore or Paul Agnew making their names. And how comfortable they all appear on the stage! The toil of preparation has flowed smoothly into a slick but natural end result, with Christie, perhaps 40 years older than most about him, sitting at the back and presiding at the harpsichord, a benign but watchful presence.

That last description may surprise some, and Agnew admits with a smile that 'Bill has a reputation for being a bit ferocious sometimes. But it's to do with him being really whole-hearted, and I can sympathise with his approach. There's no point in being half-hearted about it. We're dealing with music by geniuses, and you have to try as hard as you can to get close to them. Bill has very high expectations, and it's all to do with the music. But once you've got his confidence you can do anything, he'll trust you. He'll sit behind you, as if saying "we've worked hard on this, now you do it". In that way what we can do is more than just give a concert. You know, when a performance is about to start, Bill's always very impatient for the orchestra to tune up quickly because even after all these years he's still nervous and excited, and he can't wait to get out there and get started. He's absolutely on a mission to promote this music. He always says as we're walking on the stage, "Chantez pour convaincre" – sing to convince! We need more people like Bill who insist on brilliance.' G

## LES ARTS FLORISSANTS ON DISC

Lindsay Kemp's choice of four of Christie's finest recordings



**Bouzignac: Motets. Te Deum**
Les Arts Florissants / William Christie
Harmonia Mundi Ⓑ HMA195 1471 (6/94R)
Christie includes boys' voices for the only time in some of the most directly expressive sacred music of the French Baroque.



**Charpentier: Médée**
*Sols incl* Lorraine Hunt Médée Mark Padmore Jason
Les Arts Florissants / William Christie
Erato Ⓢ ③ 2564 66305-7 (6/95R)
Christie's second recording of Charpentier's *Médée* with searing performances from Mark Padmore and Lorraine Hunt.



**Rameau: Grands Motets**
Les Arts Florissants / William Christie
Erato Ⓢ ⑥ 2564 68686-3 (8/95R)
This *Gramophone* Award-winning disc shows Christie easily combining beauty and grace with assured dramatic energy.



**Handel: Belshazzar**
*Sols incl* Allan Clayton Belshazzar Rosemary Joshua Nitocris Les Arts Florissants / William Christie Les Arts Florissants Editions Ⓜ ③ AF001 (12/13)
The first release on LAF's own label does full justice to one of Handel's greatest oratorios.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SYLVAIN GUICHARD



# A CHRISTMAS *cornucopia*

In her selection this year, Caroline Gill includes both the usual suspects and more extraordinary repertoire to delight those lucky enough to unwrap a disc this festive season



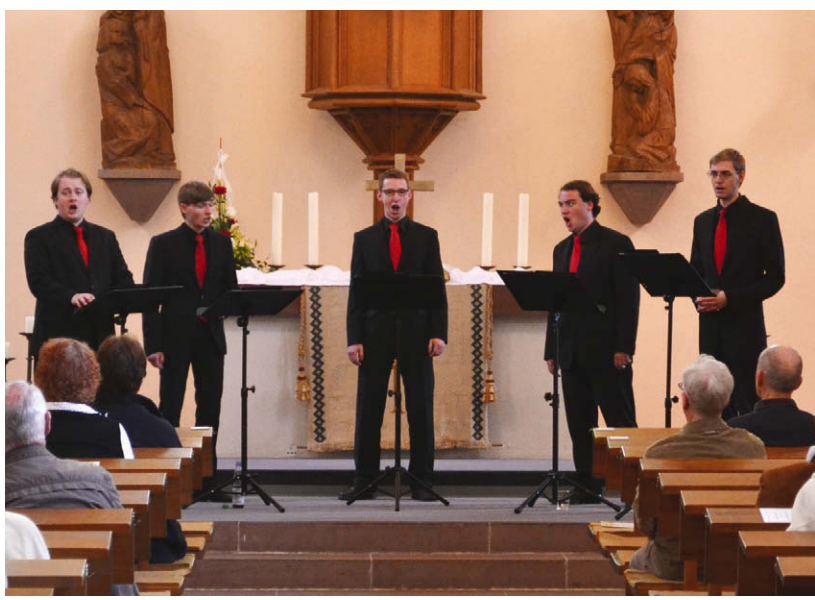
New York Polyphony: an American Christmas

'The glory days of the English carol tradition were the dark, ancient times of dances round the fire and festivals of cakes and ale,' says Andrew Gant in the epilogue to *Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir*, the companion volume to Signum's Christmas release of the same name (see review on page 114). This year's bounty is limited largely to small ensembles and Oxbridge choirs, and although there may not be great multifariousness in such a collection, there is still much to savour as it illustrates the history and traditionalism that runs behind what is fundamentally the sound of Christmas.

The first of two discs that sit easily together in this little cornucopia is **Bis willekommen** from the German group Ensemble Nobiles. Their blend is very beautiful (albeit a little top-heavy, with a corporate tonality that can push a bit sharp at times), and there is something about the type of melody and its perfect synthesis as presented here that somehow has an intrinsic festiveness to it. The disc is of purely German music (with a single piece of incongruous Victoria), and is contemplative in a way that emphasises the sense of stillness that Christmas can bring. A particularly good example, along with Paul Heller's *Maria durch ein Dornwald ging* (relatively niche, though beloved of many accomplished small choirs), is Peter Karl Wolfgang Berg's *Es kommt ein Schiff*, which is oddly Taveneresque, with shades of *Hymn to the Mother of God* pervading its early bars.

Slightly less vanilla are the succulent false relations of The Marian Consort on Delphian's **Christmas with the Shepherds** (airily recorded in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford). All Mouton and Morales (with an additional new edition of some Annibale Stabile by director Rory McCleery), a thrillingly imaginative combination of composers, it's built around the Morales *Missa Quaeramus cum pastoribus* (with only one of his free-standing motets – the beautiful *Pastores, dicite, quidnam vidistis?*, sadly with some less-than-perfect tuning in the sopranos and tenors – included). In particular there is a real sense of stasis in the Morales on this disc, which The Marian Consort have captured beautifully in their heart-stopping wait for the music to move from one posture to the next.

The intimacy of these first two discs is dramatically contrasted by the cuckoo in this nest – Arte dei Suonatori's **Venetian Christmas**, which is much more expansive and recorded in wider acoustics. Surprisingly, it doesn't start with the dramatic Vivaldian orchestral bang of the carnival that would have been under way for at least three months in the Venice of this period, but it's nevertheless a festive opening, with Vivaldi's violin concerto *Il riposo per il Santissimo Natale*. The secular nature of a lot of the repertoire on this joyful disc is an indicator of how Christmas was celebrated in Venice, with far less emphasis on religion than on celebration. There is also a crisp and immediate sound which largely adds to the disc's upbeat mood – and to its sensuality in the dark harmonies of the opening



Ensemble Nobiles from Germany: a welcome blend that's intrinsically festive
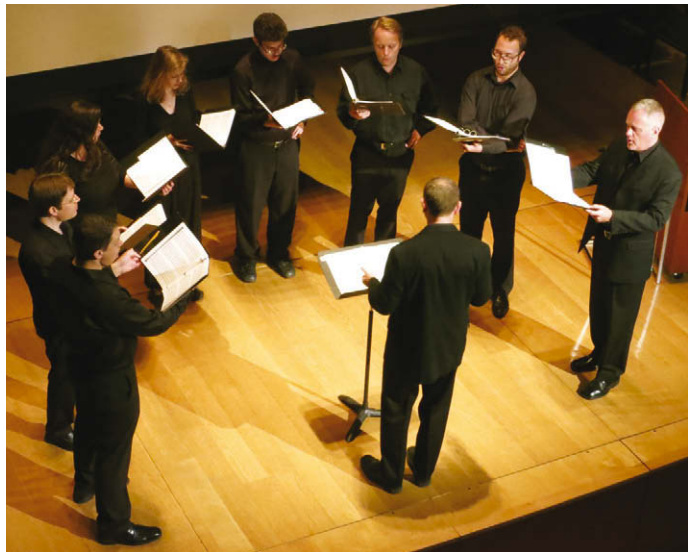
movement of the fourth Torelli Concerto grosso; but it can occasionally be too far forward for the solos sung by soprano Ruby Hughes, whose warm, well-supported voice becomes overwhelmed in such circumstances.

Schola Antiqua of Chicago, another of the small ensembles, offer their **Missa Conceptio tua: Medieval and Renaissance Music for Advent**. Producing a disc with a large proportion of medieval and Renaissance sequences requires the blend and tuning to be perfect, otherwise it has nothing to offer. Sadly, this has some questionable edits, especially in the first antiphon, *O sapientia*. Although the ensemble is good, there are edits that jar and intervals that are imperfectly tuned. The antiphons are sung by female voices; the Mass, in interesting and effective contrast, starts with a low cluster of male voices, but it is muddy in sound – this undermines it, just as the tuning does in the preceding tracks. In contrast, though, on the disc **Sing Thee Nowell** New York Polyphony have corralled some elegantly refined American Christmas repertoire that they do uncommonly well. It's perfectly together and blended, and includes new arrangements as well as sophisticated versions of old arrangements that are minutely detailed – in particular *Gabriel's Message* and *Gabriel Archangelus*. The group also have a strong sense of corporate tuning, and from track to track they come from a solidly identical tonal centre, in a way that isn't easily definable by Schola Antiqua Chicago.

Just as it is hard to imagine that the enjoyment of New York Polyphony's recording is not enhanced by a mental image of Christmas in New York, it is hard to be sure whether it is knowing that Chamber Choir Ireland's **Carols from the Old & New Worlds, Vol 3** is Irish, imagining the ruggedness of the snowbound Irish landscape, that makes this disc so appealing. It is an unassailably joyful listen either way, though. It includes many of director Paul Hillier's own unfussy but imaginative arrangements, which allow the old standards such as *O come, all ye faithful* to retain their integrity and personality at the same time as enjoying a sympathetic facelift. A good example is his arrangement of *Remember, O thou man*, but the biggest treat on this disc is the setting of *Behold a silly tender babe*, the tune being that most often associated – in more recent times – with Patrick Kavanagh's poem *On Raglan Road*.

Moving on to the intimacy of the chapel choir, the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, and the Dmitri Ensemble (together again after their collection of Imogen Holst's choral works in 2012) create a similarly engaging experience on **Lux de caelo: Music for Christmas**. The orchestral playing lifts the performance out of traditional Oxbridge chapel music into something better within an appealingly varied programme by way of the difference between the accompaniments to *Gabriel's Message*, for instance, and *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* by Praetorius. Graham Ross's arrangement of *Tu scendi dalle stelle* is a soupy surprise in the middle, with a luscious string accompaniment that is quickly and starkly contrasted by a spine-tinglingly skilful (and brave) performance of Webern's complex canon *Dormi, Jesu* and Schoenberg's even more challenging *Friede auf Erden*.

Praetorius's *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* is a common theme among this year's Christmas new releases, as it always is, but the arrangement by Jan Sandström on **Dormi Jesu: A Caius Christmas** by the Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, is notably beautiful. This is a disc of proper Christmas repertoire, and is particularly astute in its programming as it also includes Webern's *Dormi, Jesu* – a piece that (usually) rarely appears in Christmas collections. **Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir**, similarly, is an astute collection, though of the more mainstream, wrapped up in Christmas paper. The first



It's a medieval and Renaissance Christmas for Schola Antiqua of Chicago

recording by Vox Turturis, it is a survey of the best-known Christmas carols and their origins, and is therefore a much less challenging combination of Christmas vignettes than other discs in this survey; but if anyone can put this kind of combination together – singers, repertoire and arrangements – it is Gant. The disc is a companion to the book (see page 114), but in the same way is a great reference guide to the staples of the repertoire, just as **Nowell Sing We: Contemporary Carols, Vol 2** from the Choir of Worcester College, Oxford, is an interesting collection of what is going on in choral music under the radar. It covers some of the more conspicuous composers in choral music such as Gabriel Jackson and Nico Muhly but is a little more askance than many of the other recordings on offer this year. It is a perceptive choice of repertoire by conductor (and organist) Stephen Farr – all clever pieces by important figures in choral music composition such as Francis Pott, Grayston Ives, Richard Lloyd and Jamie W Hall, sung with great confidence and accuracy in acoustics that allow just enough air to circulate around the sound. G

## THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to recommended new Christmas recordings 2014



**Bis willekommen**
Ensemble Nobiles
Genuin Ⓕ GEN14314



**Carols from the Old & New Worlds, Vol 3** Chbr Ch Ireland / Hillier Harm Mundi Ⓕ HMU80 7610



**Christmas with the Shepherds**
Marian Consort / McCleery
Delphian Ⓕ DCD34145



**Lux de caelo**
Ch of Clare Coll, Cambridge; Dmitri Ensemble / Ross
Harm Mundi Ⓕ HMU90 7615



**Venetian Christmas**
Arte dei Suonatori / Gester
BIS Ⓕ BIS2089



**Dormi Jesu**
Ch of Gonville & Caius Coll, Cambridge / Webber
Delphian Ⓕ DCD34152



**Missa Conceptio tua**
Schola Antiqua of Chicago / Anderson
Naxos Ⓑ 8 573260



**Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir** Vox Turturis / Gant
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD387



**Sing Thee Nowell**
Sarah Brailey *sop* et al; New York Polyphony
BIS Ⓕ BIS2099



**Nowell Sing We: Contemporary Carols, Vol 2**
Ch of Worcester Coll, Oxford / Farr Resonus Ⓜ RES10138

PHOTOGRAPHY: JIYANG CHEN, BARBARA FROMMANN

# Critics' Choice 2014

Looking for a recent recording to give as a gift? Help is at hand, as our expert critics recommend their recording highlights from the past 12 months

## *Andrew Achenbach*

**Walton: Symphony No 1. Violin Concerto**
**Chandos Ⓕ SACD CHSA5136 (7/14)**




Edward Gardner and the BBC SO lend blistering advocacy to Walton's First, his exceptionally vital conception having both smouldering passion and thrilling cogency to commend it. The coupling comprises a comparably perceptive account of the Violin Concerto, with Tasmin Little on irreproachably charismatic form, her playing brimming with fire, sensuality, swagger and fun.

## *Nalen Anthoni*

**Mozart: String Quartets dedicated to Haydn – K387, 428 & 465**
**Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC90 2186 (A/14)**




Mozart's string quartets couldn't equal those by Haydn. Or so I thought. Now in three works the Cuarteto Casals prove me wrong. They throw politesse to the winds, scorn surface polish, traverse new regions and reassess Mozart for perpetuity. It's what recordings are for. Aren't they?

## *Philip Clark*

**Schumann: Symphonies**
**Berliner Philharmoniker Ⓕ ③ (2 CDs + Blu-ray) BPHR140011 (7/14)**




This was the year that I, after far too long, rediscovered Schumann's symphonies: every note a treat, every harmonic lurch a marvel. I've enjoyed Ticcati and Nézet-Séguin; but Sir Simon Rattle's BPO cycle became my portal back to the über-radical Romantic.

## *Mike Ashman*

**Pierre Boulez: 'The Complete Columbia Album Collection'**
**Sony Classical Ⓢ (67 discs) 88843 01333-2**




The first sustained attempt made by the French composer/conductor in the 1960s and '70s to set down performances of music that chimed with a rigorous personal professional aesthetic. Includes little 19th-century Romantic music apart from carefully filtered Berlioz and Wagner (and a collector's item – Beethoven's Fifth!) but almost complete major Second Viennese School, Bartók and Stravinsky. A CBS highlights disc of the time even came with a Boulez T-shirt...





## Alexandra Coghlan

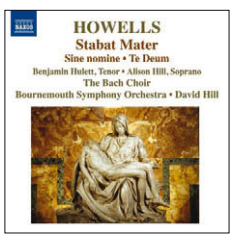
**'Wood Works'**
**Dacapo Ⓕ 8 226081**

In the talented hands of the Danish String Quartet these 'Wood Works' – traditional Nordic folksongs and dances – are buffed and polished to a glossy concert-hall sheen. Contemporary arrangements galvanise soft-grained melodic wood with textural metal, reimagining their source material with obvious affection and more than a dash of Scandi-cool.




## Jeremy Dibble

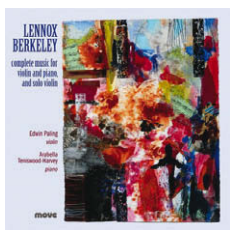
**Howells: Stabat mater. Te Deum**
**Naxos Ⓑ 8 573176 (11/14)**




The Bach Choir and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, under David Hill's brilliant direction, execute Howells's numinous *Stabat mater* (a work to rival the better-known *Hymnus Paradisi*) with fluency and insight. A real find on this CD, too, is the *Sine nomine* for orchestra and soloists, a work which seems to encapsulate those ideals of the 'English Pastoral School' yet is also haunted by darkness and melancholy.

## Peter Dickinson

**L Berkeley: 'Complete Music for Violin and Piano, and Solo Violin'**
**Move Ⓕ MD3361 (A/13)**




Real discoveries here, including Sonata No 1 – lost for 48 years. The Sonatina and Elegy reveal Berkeley's unique charisma. Edwin Paling led the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for over 30 years, while Arabella Teniswood-Harvey is at the University of Tasmania: a fine duo in revelatory performances 25 years after the composer's death.

## Duncan Druce

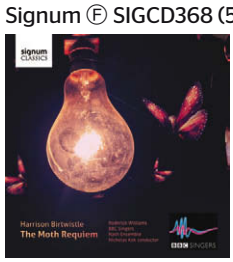
**Brahms. Schubert. Schumann: Works for Viola and Piano**
**Aparté Ⓕ AP069 (2/14)**




The voice of the 'middle fiddle' (according to Percy Grainger) has rarely been heard to better advantage than on Lise Berthaud and Adam Laloum's programme of Brahms, Schubert and Schumann. Berthaud's warm, flexible tone is a joy to hear, and she and Laloum pass on a strong involvement with the emotions of all three works.

## Adrian Edwards

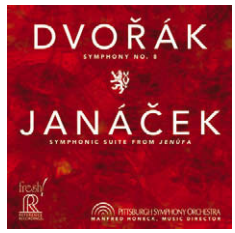
**Birtwistle: The Moth Requiem**
**Signum Ⓕ SIGCD368 (5/14)**




When Birtwistle introduced the UK premiere of *The Moth Requiem* at a 2013 Prom, he intially engaged his audience by suggesting that our negative view of moths was conditioned by the havoc they wreak on our precious cashmere garments. Maybe we should consider the message herein. *The Moth Requiem* is a Requiem to nature in peril and our own wider commemoration of loved ones lost. This poignant piece engages our full attention for its relatively brief running time.

## Rob Cowan

**Dvořák: Symphony No 8**
**Reference Recordings Ⓕ SACD FR710SACD (A/14)**




Manfred Honeck's Pittsburgh Symphony recording of Dvořák's Eighth Symphony is among the most stylish, fastidiously prepared, excitingly interpreted and beautifully played orchestral performances I've heard in a long while, and the recording fully matches Honeck's musical achievement. Anyone who cares about sensitive phrasing, the sort you spontaneously return to just to relish the moment, can hardly fail to respond.

## Jed Distler

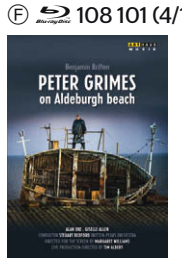
**CPE Bach: 'The Complete Works for Piano Solo'**
**Hänssler Classic Ⓢ (26 discs) CD98 003**




At long last, a truly complete collection of CPE Bach's capricious, inventive and endlessly interesting solo keyboard output, organised and annotated with care, beautifully engineered, and performed by a pianist – Ana-Marija Markovina – who understands and communicates the music's stylistic characteristics and finely honed yet harmonically volatile idiom to the point of clairvoyance.

## Richard Fairman

**Britten: Peter Grimes on Aldeburgh Beach**
**ArtHaus Musik Ⓕ DVD 102 179; Ⓕ Blu-ray 108 101 (4/14)**

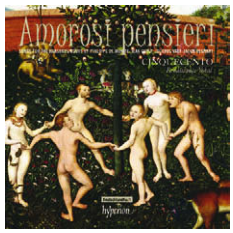



This souvenir from Britten's centenary deserves a lasting place in the catalogue. Filmed live on Aldeburgh beach, Tim Albery's production of *Peter Grimes* lays the opera open to the elements and captures a windswept, emotionally engulfing performance, in which the human story is palpably at the mercy of forces beyond its control.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SONY CLASSICAL; CAROLINE BITTENCOURT

## *David Fallows*

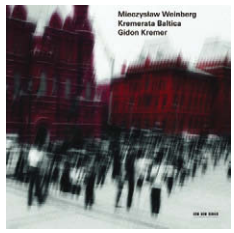
**'Amorosi pensieri'**
**Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68053 (7/14)**




For me, the most refreshing novelty of the year was the ensemble Cinquecento in their delicious 'Amorosi pensieri', virtually unknown secular music by Franco-Flemish composers at the Imperial Court in Vienna: de Monte, Regnart, Guyot and Vaet. None of these deserves to be overlooked; and Cinquecento give magical performances here.

## *David Fanning*

**Weinberg: Orchestral & Chamber Works**
**ECM New Series Ⓕ ② 481 0669 (4/14)**




I'm going with the two-disc Weinberg set by Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica on ECM. These recordings of the knotty Tenth Symphony and Third Solo Violin Sonata, and the more genial String Trio, Violin Sonatina and Concertino, show why the current Weinberg revival is likely to be far more than an ephemeral affair.

## *Fabrice Fitch*

**Homilius: Motets, Vol 2**
**Carus Ⓕ CARUS83 266 (6/14)**




Passing over Awards nominees and monthly Editor's Choices, I recommend this selection of motets by Gottfried August Homilius, a pupil of JS Bach whose music seems to span periods outside its own and stands comparison with that of Bach's sons. Sirventes Berlin's subtle and dedicated performances make this disc well worth exploring.

## *Jonathan Freeman-Attwood*

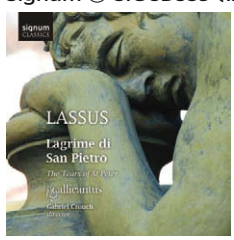
**Bach: Orchestral Suites**
**Accent Ⓕ ACC24279 (12/13)**




If we fear for generic designer-performances in Bach's orchestral perennials, Sigiswald Kuijken's exquisitely nuanced, primed but challenging readings will do the trick. It's an affecting vision of intimate exchange, Arcadian *pastorale* and grand gesture allowing for highly original coloration amid a strong quest for 'antique' resonance. A world unto itself.

## *Caroline Gill*

**Lassus: Lagrime di San Pietro**
**Signum Ⓕ SIGCD339 (12/13)**




Gallicantus sing this cycle of sacred madrigals and its climactic motet with all the gravity and respect it requires as the major milestone in the development of art music that it was. Live, on a rainy Sunday afternoon at the Wigmore Hall, it was one of the most profound musical experiences of my year; on disc it comes almost as close.

## *Edward Greenfield*

**Walton: Violin Concerto. Symphony No 1**
**Chandos Ⓕ CHSA5136 (7/14)**



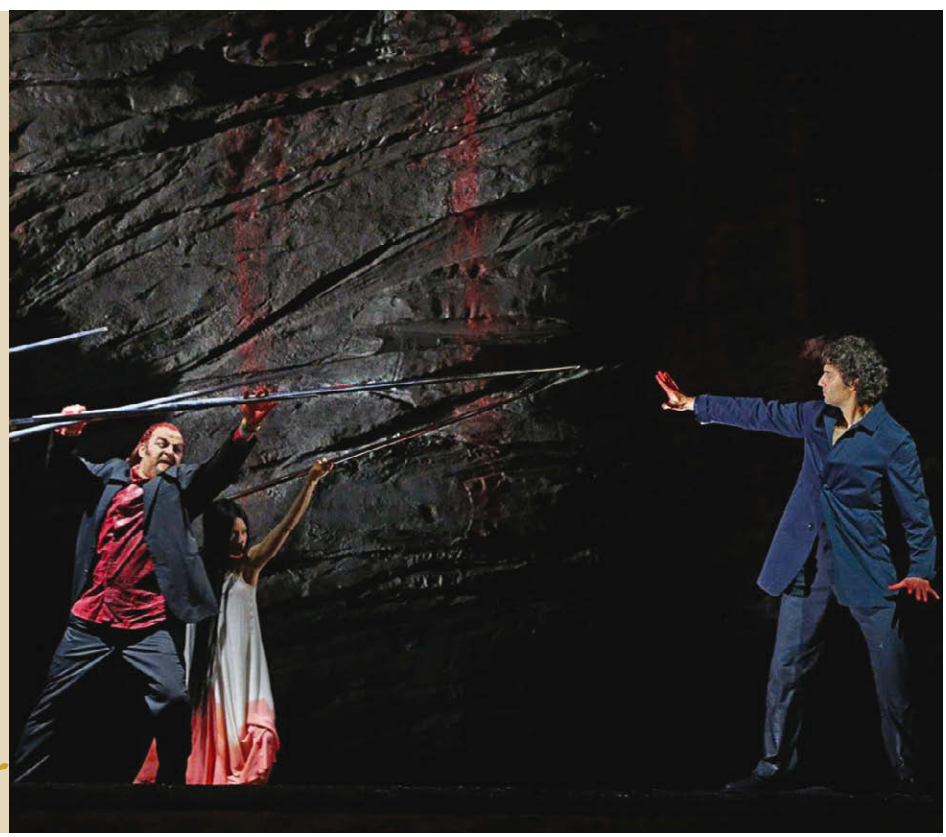

The ideal coupling of two of Walton's most electrifying works, the Symphony No 1 and the Violin Concerto, here comes in superb performances conducted by Edward Gardner with the BBC SO. Gardner's account of the symphony comes near to matching Previn with the LSO, while Tasmin Little gives a heartfelt account of the Violin Concerto.

## *David Gutman*

**Wagner: Parsifal**
**Sony Classical Ⓕ DVD 88883 72558-9;**
**Ⓕ Blu-ray 88883 72572-9 (A/14)**



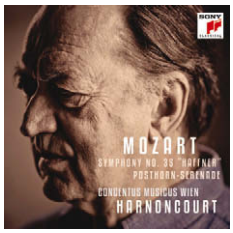

With director François Girard retaining helpful elements of old-style literalism, Daniele Gatti conducts this darkly radiant, expensively blood-soaked makeover (from memory!) with rapt dedication – there's less in the way of forward momentum. Peter Mattei (Amfortas), René Pape (Gurnemanz) and Jonas Kaufmann (Parsifal) are vocally tireless, streets ahead of modern-day rivals.



PHOTOGRAPHY: 2013 KEN HOWARD/METROPOLITAN OPERA

## *Lindsay Kemp*

**Mozart: Symphony No 35, 'Haffner'. 'Posthorn' Serenade**
**Sony Classical Ⓕ 88883 72068-2 (4/14)**




Nikolaus Harnoncourt has had a busy year of Mozart but I was delighted by his first offering of 2014, a joyful *Posthorn* Serenade and *Haffner* Symphony with the Vienna Concentus Musicus, whose brusque humour and alert imagination captures in music the playful spirit so evident in the composer's letters.

## *Philip Kennicott*

**CPE Bach: 'Württemberg' Sonatas**
**Hyperion Ⓕ CDA67995 (2/14)**




I spent most of the year procrastinating, unable to stop listening and start writing an article on CPE Bach. Perhaps I was enjoying the process too much, or maybe I wasn't able to wrap my mind around the complexities of the composer's music. Mahan Esfahani's traversal of the 'Württemberg' Sonatas was one of the delights of the composer's anniversary year, fully embodying the enormous range and subtlety of Bach's expressive language, his playfulness, his tenderness and his manifold idiosyncrasies.

*'Esfahani's traversal of the "Württemberg" Sonatas was one of the delights of the composer's anniversary year'* ***Philip Kennicott***

## *Richard Lawrence*

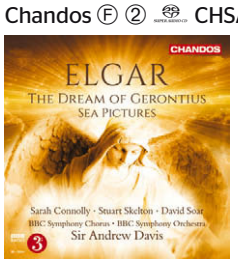
**Shostakovich: Symphony No 4**
**Naxos Ⓑ 8 573188 (11/13)**




I heard the first London performance of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony way back when, the Philharmonia conducted by Rozhdestvensky. Though the details have faded from the memory, I recall the audience's response. From the xylophone's dancing skeleton at the beginning to the hushed pedal-point an hour later, this terrific performance by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic under Vasily Petrenko will leave you equally overwhelmed.

## *Ivan March*

**Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius**
**Chandos Ⓕ ② CHSA5140 (11/14)**




Sir Andrew Davis's inspired performance of Elgar's glorious masterpiece is perfect. The Priest (David Soar) sings an arresting 'Go forth upon thy journey', and the warm-voiced Gerontius (Stuart Skelton) is received magnificently by the BBC Symphony Chorus's 'Praise to the Holiest in the height'. Finally comes the Angel, Sarah Connolly's infinitely touching 'Farewell'. She is equally moving in the autumnal *Sea Pictures*.

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## *Ivan Moody*

**Panufnik: Symphonic Works, Vol 8 – Concertos**
**CPO Ⓕ CPO777 687-2 (11/14)**




An outstanding disc containing some of Panufnik's most remarkable music, stunningly performed. Particular highlights are the crystalline, delicate slow movement of the Piano Concerto (Ewa Kupiec) and the journey towards the light that is the Cello Concerto (Raphael Wallfisch). All the soloists are completely attuned to Panufnik's idiom, and Łukasz Borowicz's direction of the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra is inspired.



## *Bryce Morrison*

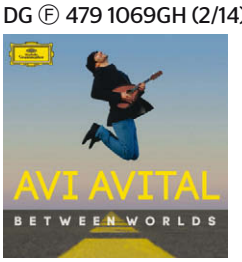
**Jorge Bolet: 'The Complete RCA and Columbia Album Collection'**
**RCA Red Seal Ⓢ ⑩ 88843 01472-2**




Despite challenges from Marc-André Hamelin (a wonder of refinement in Debussy) and Antonio Pompa-Baldi (searingly intense in his novel tribute to Liszt), pride of place must go to Jorge Bolet. Made before his playing lost some of its glory, RCA's 10-disc collection shows him as a pianist of limitless eloquence and breadth.

## *Geoffrey Norris*

**'Between Worlds'**
**DG Ⓕ 479 1069GH (2/14)**




This is a terrific showcase for Avi Avital's virtuosity and warm-hearted artistry. It is a real United Nations of a disc – from Dvořák to the Georgia of Tsintsadze, from Bloch to Bartók and Bulgarian folksong, showing how expressively versatile the mandolin can be. Avital's finesse and fast fingers work wonders.

## *Jeremy Nicholas*

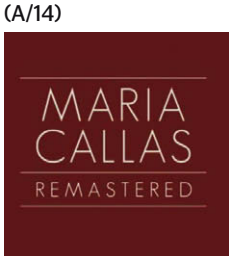
**Gary Graffman: 'The Complete RCA and Columbia Album Collection'**
**Sony Classical Ⓢ** (24 discs) **88725 46239-2 (1/14)**




'Bach Inspirations' from young Hannes Minnaar impressed on the Cobra label, as did Ingrid Fliter's Chopin concertos from Linn. APR's complete Arthur de Greef was a revelation; but for a Christmas gift it has to be the box of 24 CDs celebrating the art of Gary Graffman, with almost as many benchmark recordings as there are discs.

## *Richard Osborne*

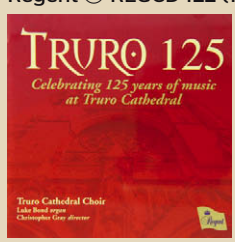
**'Maria Callas Remastered: The Complete Studio Recordings'**
**Warner Classics Ⓢ** (69 discs) **2564 63399-1 (A/14)**




Featuring 26 complete operas and 13 recitals, this must be the gramophone event of the year. Callas's voice recorded perfectly well; it was its transfer to and from disc which caused the problems. Thanks to new state-of-the-art software and painstaking editing of the original tapes, we are now as close as we shall ever be to hearing this unique artist as she actually sounded live in the studio.

## *Christopher Nickol*

**'Truro 125'**
**Regent Ⓑ REGCD422 (1/14)**




It's wonderful to hear new and challenging settings of a variety of texts. Whether from the creativity of nationally famous or lesser-known composers, the music is consistently excellent. The marvellous singing of the Truro Cathedral Choir, plus the mighty sounds of the Willis organ, make this a CD to treasure.



## *Stephen Plaistow*

**Beethoven: Piano Sonatas**
**Sony Classical Ⓑ ② 88883 74735-2 (11/13)**




Igor Levit's account of the Bach Partitas has been a recent Recording of the Month and drove me back to his earlier issue of the last five Beethoven sonatas. Don't ask me which is the finer achievement: they are not commensurate! Yet I can't recall any new version of the Beethoven masterpieces by a young player – the final trilogy plus the *Hammerklavier* Sonata and Op 101 in A major – that reaches Levit's intellectual command and abundance of insights allied to such glorious piano-playing.

*'This is what I hoped the Strauss year would bring: a fine new recording of a neglected opera'* *Peter Quantrill*

## *Peter Quantrill*

**R Strauss: Intermezzo**
**CPO Ⓕ ② CPO777 901-2 (11/14)**




This is what I hoped the Strauss year would bring: a fine new recording of a neglected opera. *Intermezzo* is an uncomfortably autobiographical 'comedy' every bit as modern in form and intent as his early shockers such as *Salome*. Simone Schneider is worthy of the formidable Pauline herself, by turns erotic and shrewish. Brigitte Fassbaender's voice-bending turn as a crew of speaking characters (female and male) might not work onstage but it makes for comedy gold at home.

## *Guy Rickards*

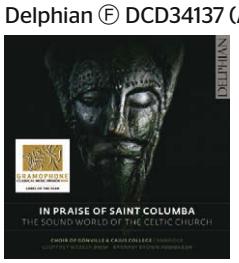
**Pettersson: Symphony No 9**
**BIS Ⓕ BIS2038 (5/14)**




What to choose, what to choose: Gál's First Symphony from Kenneth Woods (Avie), Allan Pettersson's Ninth or – this year's surprise package – Röntgen's string trios (Champs Hill)? These last are a constant delight for their freshness of invention but Pettersson's mighty symphony, as performed by the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra under Christian Lindberg, has a far greater power and profundity of expression.

## *Malcolm Riley*

**'In Praise of St Columba'**
**Delphian Ⓕ DCD34137 (A/14)**




Out of the many memorable discs reviewed this year, this anthology disc of music ranging from 7th-century Iona to a nearly new Pibroch of 2010 has been the most stimulating to listen to repeatedly. The duet improvised on 8th-century-style horns remains as startlingly and hauntingly beautiful as ever. Hats off to the spirit of adventure of Barnaby Brown and his talented Cambridge collaborators.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL RICHARDS/PR4PHOTOS


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## Marc Rochester

**MacMillan: Visions of a November Spring**
**Delphian Ⓕ DCD34088 (A/14)**




James MacMillan's 55th birthday fell during the year and among a number of discs released marking the occasion was this stunner from the Edinburgh Quartet. There is something profoundly moving about this intimate music, not least the emotionally charged *For Sonny*, composed in memory of the tragic and premature death of an infant.

***'Compellingly sung, beautifully conducted and played, it's a delight'*** *Hugo Shirley*

## Hugo Shirley

**R Strauss: Intermezzo**
**CPO Ⓕ ② CPO777 901-2 (11/14)**




The Strauss anniversary hasn't delivered a bumper crop but CPO's excellent new recording of his autobiographical 'bourgeois comedy' shouldn't be allowed to slip under any Straussian's radar – or any opera lover's, for that matter. Compellingly sung, beautifully conducted and played, it's a delight, and an important addition to the composer's discography.

## Harriet Smith

**Beethoven: Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 4**
**Sony Classical Ⓕ 88883 70548-2 (6/14)**



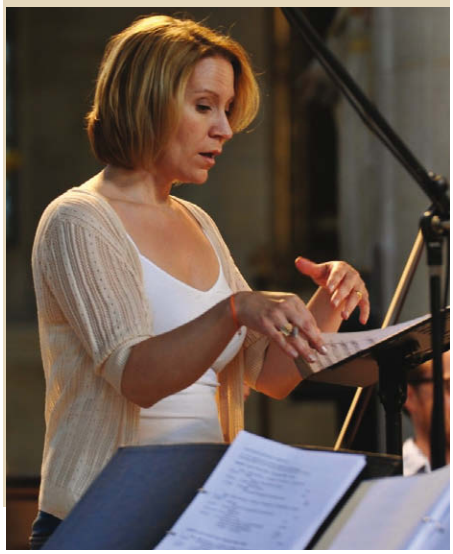

Beethoven proved king this year; I was much taken with Trio Zimmermann's superbly reactive readings of his Op 3 and Op 8. But that has to cede the top spot to the concerto cycle from Leif Ove Andsnes and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. Picking just one, the second volume finds them joyously unbuttoned in the Second Concerto, while the Fourth is, quite simply, one of the most moving renditions in the catalogue.

## Julie Anne Sadie

**'A French Baroque Diva'**
**Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68035 (7/14)**




This evocation of Rameau's muse, the soprano Marie Fel – who enjoyed a glittering career in Paris, as a soloist at the Opéra and in choral and orchestral works at the Concert Spirituel, and at Versailles and Fontainebleau – by Carolyn Sampson and Ex Cathedra provides invaluable context for little-known French masterpieces.



## Ken Smith

**Benjamin: Written on Skin**
**Opus Arte Ⓕ DVD OA1125D;**
**Ⓕ Blu-ray OABD7136D (4/14)**

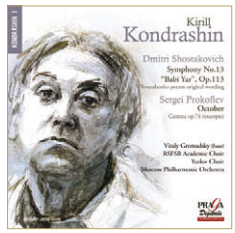



With a live recording already available, why take up more shelf space with the DVD? Even though George Benjamin's first full-length opera is so psychologically laden that staging might seem superfluous, Katie Mitchell's original production matches visual layers to musical ones – with subtitles to catch every turn in Martin Crimp's text.

***'Quite simply, as wholehearted, as gritty, as angry, as defiant as any performance you are ever likely to hear'*** *Edward Seckerson*

## Edward Seckerson

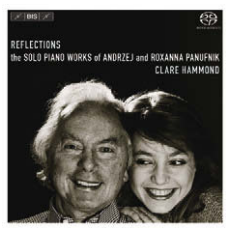
**Shostakovich: Symphony No 13, etc**
**Praga Digitals Ⓕ SACD PRD/DSD350 089 (9/14)**




Tempted as I was to celebrate the completion of Vasily Petrenko's Liverpool Philharmonic cycle with this tremendous piece, there is something so potent and historically significant about this famous live performance (brilliantly remastered by Praga) that it had to take pride of place. It is, quite simply, as wholehearted, as gritty, as angry, as defiant as any performance you are ever likely to hear.

## Pwyll ap Siôn

**A & R Panufnik: 'Reflections'**
**BIS Ⓕ SACD BIS2003 (8/14)**

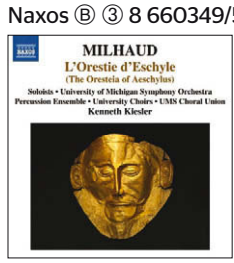



Father and daughter's music is featured on this rich and diverse collection for solo piano. Clare Hammond's performance is excellent throughout, especially in Panufnik Snr's virtuoso *Twelve Miniature Studies*, which shift rapidly between powerful, visceral and dreamier, more reflective moments.

***'Katie Mitchell's production matches visual layers to musical ones'*** *Ken Smith*

## David Patrick Stearns

**Milhaud: L'Orestie d'Eschyle**
**Naxos Ⓑ ③ 8 660349/51**




You thought you knew Darius Milhaud? His medium-weight, jazz-inflected works hardly hint at the epic *Oresteia of Aeschylus*, which occupied him and librettist Paul Claudel from 1913 to 1923, evolving into a mercilessly fierce brand of primitivism that certainly influenced Stravinsky's 1927 *Oedipus Rex*. The University of Michigan forces under Kenneth Kiesler are mighty if not always the most idiomatic. But just be glad this set exists.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON PERRY

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**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

**"Salzman's music is full of wit and high spirits. At times its contemporary dissonances seem a sendup... In the song for the Broadway gypsy its melodies and rhythms seem very much Tin Pan Alley. At times, as one would expect of as formidable a figure as Salzman, the music was more learned... the tone is fresh and entertaining... challenging and refreshing."**
**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**

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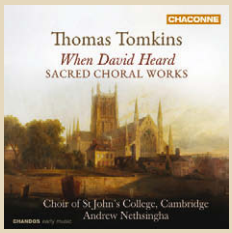
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## David Threasher

**Tomkins: When David Heard**
**Chandos Chaconne Ⓕ CHAN0804 (10/14)**

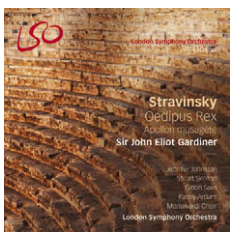



What better music for these sad, distracted times than the work of the first great Welsh composer, Thomas Tomkins (born in St David's in 1572), as sung by the finest of the college choirs, conducted by Andrew Nethsingha, and ranging from quotidian church works to the almost unbearable poignancy of the anthem from which the disc takes its title.



## John Warrack

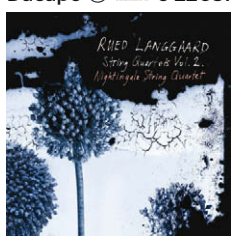
**Stravinsky: Oedipus Rex. Appolon Musagète**
**LSO Live Ⓕ LSO0751 (7/14)**




An unusual approach to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* comes with the declamation most eloquently delivered by the French film star Fanny Ardant; but it works well, in a performance more expressive than usual for this work by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, coupled with a graceful, dance-suffused *Apollon Musagète*.

## Richard Whitehouse

**Langgaard: String Quartets, Vol 2**
**Dacapo Ⓕ 6 220576 (4/14)**




Rued Langgaard's output is one of qualitative extremes but the string quartets find him at his best. Vol 2 of the Nightingale Quartet's survey has the volatile spontaneity of *Rose Garden Play*, the tensile classicism of the A flat Quartet and the fervent nostalgia of the Fourth Quartet. Superb readings by an ensemble destined for greatness.

## Richard Wigmore

**Schubert: Nachtviolen – Lieder**
**Sony Classical Ⓕ 88883 71217-2 (A/14)**




This comes close to my ideal of Schubert-singing. In symbiotic partnership with Gerold Huber, Christian Gerhaher perfectly balances tonal beauty with intense yet unforced characterisation. Everything he does is alive, specific, not least a revelatory performance of the rare 'An den Mond in einer Herbstnacht'.



## David Vickers

**Rameau: 'Le grand théâtre de l'Amour'**
**Erato Ⓕ 934149-2 (2/14)**




A voyage through every aspect of Rameau's genius, not just Sabine Devieilhe's entrancing performances of *ariettes* but also entire scenes featuring other soloists, sometimes choruses, and Les Ambassadeurs contribute an assortment of orchestral divertissements. From pastoral to tragic and every shade in between, this recital of Ramellian marvels adds up to far more than the sum of its entrancing parts.

*'Brilliantly convincing performances and richly detailed recordings of very fine music'* Arnold Whittall

## Arnold Whittall

**Chin: Concertos**
**DG Ⓕ 481 0971GH (11/14)**




A disc from 2014 that makes an unusually persuasive case for the continued relevance of 20th-century-style modernism is this DG release containing three instantly gripping and satisfyingly diverse concertos by Unsuk Chin. Brilliantly convincing performances and richly detailed recordings of very fine music.

## William Yeoman

**'El Maestro Farinelli'**
**Archiv Ⓕ 479 2050AH (7/14)**




Pablo Heras-Casado heads his own Aranjuez-based period band, La Compañía Teatro del Principe. Here, however, the dynamic Spanish conductor teams up with HIP veterans Concerto Köln for a zesty, eclectic programme of mostly instrumental music associated with Farinelli's time as an impresario in Spain. Thoroughly addictive, with the CPE Bach E minor Sinfonia 'Fandango' worth the ticket price alone.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNELIES VAN DER VEGT, JIM RAKETE/SONY CLASSICAL

# The making of modern musicians

Competitions are increasingly offering their winners more than merely prizes to help them prepare for today's music business, finds Ariane Todes



Pianist Pavel Kolesnikov takes a bow after winning the Honens competition

It's telling that the website of the Queen Elisabeth Competition offers the quote 'competitions are for horses' at the top of the page about its history. Attributed to Béla Bartók, it sums up one of the major criticisms of music competitions throughout history – how can you judge or compare art objectively? That one of the most historic and prestigious music competitions in the world faces the question head-on is not entirely surprising, though. For in recent years, the best of the international competitions have been challenging themselves about what they do, how they do it and, most importantly, what they offer the tender young musicians who come to them with a dream in their hearts and the required 10,000 hours of work in the bag.

*'Progressive competitions have made the post-competition support they offer as much of an incentive to apply as the money'*

These young people certainly hope for financial rewards – the winner of the Van Cliburn competition can take home US$50,000, for example – but they also see winning as a route to a career. And there are enough famous players who have won competitions to back this up – David Oistrakh, Leonid Kogan and Vadim Repin all won the Queen Elisabeth Competition; Seiji Ozawa the 1959 International Competition for Young Conductors, Besançon; Sian Edwards and Martyn Brabbins the Leeds Conductors Competition; Martha Argerich, Maurizio Pollini and Krystian Zimerman the International Chopin Competition; Louis Kaufman, Stephen Hough, Dawn Upshaw the Naumberg. But there are also many well-known players who never entered a contest in their life and, equally, many who have greater careers than the players who tipped them to first place: Nikolaj Znaider came fifth in the 1991 Menuhin competition, Leonidas Kavakos came second at the 1986 Indianapolis violin competition. Competitions have never actually guaranteed success after all.

They continue to proliferate, though, with new ones popping up every year. As this happens, the competition *between* competitions increases so it's in their interests to attract the best competitors and juries. Allied to this is the fact that building a performing career is no longer a question of being a brilliant player, but involves a complex job description of being note-perfect, telegenic, well groomed, well spoken, diversified, savvy, online, public, flexible, etc, with shrewd young players knowing that they need more than prize money to build a career. Lewis Kaplan, Juilliard Violin Professor and former juror of competitions including the Queen Elisabeth, Sendai and Henryk Szeryng, says, 'Students today are remarkably sophisticated. They don't have illusions but they have high hopes. Many have told me that they enter competitions because they have no choice.'

As a result of these needs, progressive competitions have over time made the post-competition support they offer as much of an incentive to apply as the money, offering career advice, media training, concert engagements and festival appearances. And given that having a professional recording is a calling card for any musician, several competitions offer winners the recording possibilities that can be so hard to find in the real world. So how does this aspect of the prize benefit young musicians?

Canada's Honens piano competition, which has been going since 1992, wears its idealism on its sleeve with the brand statement, 'Honens discovers, nurtures and presents Complete Artists – 21st century pianists for 21st century audiences.'

Its Artist Development programme offers the prizewinner three years of representation, artistic guidance and the production of a CD. The winner in 2012 was Pavel Kolesnikov, whose competition performances were released on Honens's own label (2/14) and who has since recorded Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* for Hyperion (8/14). He acknowledges, 'winning Honens opened many doors for me. My life at the moment would have been very different without that competition.' Making the Tchaikovsky recording offered him a vital learning curve: 'Just like the stage, a studio is a miraculous world that can only be explored from within. It is very different from the stage, however, and its laws are sometimes opposite. I learnt many things about myself and my playing.' He has some doubts about the current climate for competitions: 'Music competitions have become a significant part of musical life, but the way they work is still imperfect. We have to work hard to reorganise their structure gradually, bringing them in line with their initial function – to help young musicians on their artistic way.'

Violinist Benjamin Baker has won prizes in several international competitions, including the Michael Hill Competition, the Royal Philharmonic Society Emily Anderson Prize and first prize in the 2013 Windsor string competition. He explains the benefits of competitions: 'They offer great exposure – a chance to separate yourself from the herd. You have to prepare a big programme and perform under pressure, and there's a lot of personal growth that can come out of that.' Like Honens, Windsor follows up with engagements, including with the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Windsor Festival, and a recording opportunity through the Champs Hill label. Baker says, 'The CD is the most useful part, in a way, because it's a stake in the ground and will always be there. Recording is a very different art to playing concerts, so to have that experience is invaluable. It was a privileged experience to record my first CD in such a professional way.'

Further back in time, recording contracts often followed competition wins without being built into the prize. Barry Douglas, who sensationally, as a non-Russian, won the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1986 and credits it for supporting his career, says: 'I had been building up my career slowly and steadily, but this was a transformation in my life and in the invitations I had to play. Something like that is of vast importance.' He was also given an RCA Red Seal contract soon after. He acknowledges how useful this was but cautions young winners: 'I was given a fantastic contract, but I was 26 and I had quite a big repertoire before I even went there. But for people who don't have that, they can't just start recording anything, because it's there for ever. You have to make sure you're ready. The record industry is difficult enough at the moment: you have to be certain that you can make a statement about a piece of music that you can stand by.'



Irish pianist Barry Douglas caused a stir when he won the Tchaikovsky Competition



Violinist Benjamin Baker plays at the Windsor Festival string competition

Susanne Barthelmes, General Manager of the Menuhin competition, echoes this concern. The Menuhin has junior and senior rounds open to those under 22 years of age, but doesn't offer recording opportunities. Barthelmes explains: 'It has a lot to do with the tender age of our competitors. Most of them need to develop and mature for another few years before they are at the stage of recording a debut album.' However, winners and non-winners alike are offered opportunities such as masterclasses, festivals and summer music camps, and, as with other competitions, the consultations they receive from jurors during the competition can provide life-changing insight.

By the very nature of the competitors, winners of the Banff string quartet competition tend to have greater maturity and, thanks to Banff Centre's audio engineering course, they are offered the chance to record with a crack production team. Barry Shiffman, Executive Director, explains how this can benefit the winners' prospects: 'With most classical productions there's not the opportunity to recoup the cost of the recording so we eliminate those costs and make it more attractive to a label to distribute the recording and to promote the quartet's career.' They go one stage further, offering all 10 competing quartets the chance to make a professionally produced five-minute video of themselves playing. As Shiffman says, 'They can then go away with something that they can give to managers, saying, "This is who we are."' Banff also offers coaching about practical aspects such as giving interviews, taking photoshoots and organising tour finances – the nitty-gritty of being a professional musician.

It's a tough world out there and all these extras, particularly recording a CD and having a finished product to show, offer young musicians a practical way to make it feel less so – which is arguably more important than a cash prize. There may still remain big practical and ethical questions about music competitions; there may be competitions that are not moving quickly enough to acknowledge the pressures on winners and to cultivate an artistic culture. But as they increasingly adapt to supporting their contestants' needs, there is the possibility that they might turn out thoroughbreds who are likely to stay the course. G

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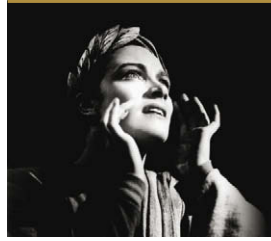
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# MUSIC COMPETITIONS **GUIDE**

Many of the world's leading classical artists, including Murray Perahia, Nicola Benedetti and Vladimir Ashkenazy, have had their careers launched by a competition victory – who will be next?

## UNITED KINGDOM

### Cecil Aronowitz Viola Competition

This new three-day competition held at Birmingham Conservatoire is dedicated to Cecil Aronowitz, the South African viola player and long-term collaborator with Benjamin Britten. It is open to viola players aged under 21 from all around the world, who compete for cash prizes ranging from £200 to £2000, and the chance to give several high-profile recitals as part of Birmingham Conservatoire's concert series. The competition, which will take place every three years, is streamed live and is part of a mini-festival of other events.

**Next competition** October 2017

**bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire**

### BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

**Previous winners** *Singer of the World: Jamie Barton (2013), Ekaterina Scherbachenko (2009), Anja Harteros (1999), Karita Mattila (1983)*
*Song Prize: Jamie Barton (2013), Elizabeth Watts (2007), Ailish Tynan (2003), Bryn Terfel (1989)*

Established in 1983 and taking place every other June at St David's Hall, this competition features 20 young singers selected from worldwide auditions. The winner receives £15,000, a trophy and possible engagements with the BBC and Welsh National Opera, while the audience votes for the winner of the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize, who receives £2000 and a trophy. Singers can also compete for the Song Prize, which offers £5000, a trophy and a place on the BBC New Generation Artists scheme.

**Next competition** June 14-21, 2015

**bbc.co.uk**

**Previous winner's recording**
**Verdi** Messa da Requiem
*Sols incl* **Anja Harteros** *sop*
**Chorus and Orchestra of La Scala, Milan / Daniel Barenboim**
Decca Ⓕ ② 478 5245DX2 (11/13)



Jamie Barton wins the Cardiff Singer of the World competition in 2013

### BBC Young Musician of the Year

**Previous winners** *Martin James Bartlett (2014), Nicola Benedetti (2004), Jennifer Pike (2002), Natalie Clein (1994)*

Founded by Humphrey Burton and Walter Todds in 1978, this biennial search for the UK's most talented young musician is open to string, percussion, keyboard, brass and woodwind players aged 18 and under. It consists of five stages with a televised final in which the winner is awarded £2000 and a specially designed trophy. This year saw the introduction of a new Jazz Award, which was won by the 17-year-old saxophonist Alexander Bone.

**Next competition** 2016

**bbc.co.uk**

**Previous winner's recording**
**Szymanowski** Violin Concerto No 1
**Tavener** Fragment for the Virgin
**Nicola Benedetti** *vn*
**LSO / Daniel Harding**
DG Ⓕ 987 0577 (6/05)

### Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

**Previous winners** *Christina Gansch (2014), Ben Johnson (2008), Katherine Broderick (2007), Kate Royal (2004), Karen Cargill (2002)*

Held every April at Wigmore Hall, this competition is aimed at singers aged 28 and under. It was founded in 1956 in memory of the Lancashire contralto who died aged 41 and is open to singers of any nationality who have completed at least one year of study in the UK or Ireland. Awards include a first prize of £12,500, a second prize of £6000, a song prize of £5000 and an accompanist's award of £3000 provided by Help Musicians UK.

**Next competition** finals: April 22 and 24, 2015

**ferrierawards.org.uk**

**Previous winner's recording**
**'Kate Royal'** Recital
**Kate Royal** *sop* **Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Edward Gardner**
Warner Classics Ⓕ 394419-2 (10/07)

### The Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

**Previous winners** *Alexandre Bloch (2012), Clemens Schuldt (2010), David Afkham (2008)*

Founded in 1990 by the philanthropist Donatella Flick, this biennial competition aims to launch the careers of conductors aged under 35, from any EU country. The final is held at Barbican Hall, where three competitors conduct the London Symphony Orchestra. Along with receiving a cash prize of £15,000, the winner has the chance to become Assistant Conductor with the LSO for up to one year.

**Next competition** December 6-8, 2014

**conducting.org**

**Previous winner's recording**
**Shostakovich** Symphony No 10
**Ligeti** Atmosphères
**Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra / David Afkham**
Orfeo Ⓕ C979 111B (12/11)

### The Leeds International Piano Competition

**Previous winners** *Federico Colli (2012), Sofya Gulyak (2009), Sunwook Kim (2006), Artur Pizarro (1990), Murray Perahia (1972), Radu Lupu (1969)*

Affectionately nicknamed 'the Leeds', this triennial competition has been kickstarting the careers of now world-famous pianists ever since it was founded in 1961 by Dame Fanny Waterman and Marion Thorpe. Its competitors, who hail from all over the world, have the chance to win the Princess Mary Gold Medal, cash prizes from £1500 to £20,000 are on offer as well as prestigious engagements with institutions ranging from the CBSO to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

**Next competition** August 26 – September 13, 2015

**leedspiano.com**

**Previous winner's recording**
**Medtner** Four Fairy Tales
**Prokofiev** Piano Sonata No 6
**Sofya Gulyak** *pf*
Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD064 (12/13)

### Northern Ireland International Organ Competition

**Previous winners** *Andrew Forbes (2014), Richard Gowers (2013), Ben Bloor (2012), Ben Comeau (2011)*

Now in its fourth year, this annual competition takes place in Armagh, Northern Ireland, and targets talented organists aged 21 and under. The winner receives a cash prize of £1000 along with

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIAN TARR

opportunities to make a professional CD recording and give recitals at prestigious venues including Westminster Abbey. There are also second, third and special Bach prizes available.
**Next competition** 2015
**niioc.com**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Britten** Sacred Choral Music
**Ben Bloor** *org* **Choir of New College Oxford / Edward Higginbottom**
Novum Ⓜ ② NCR1386 (5/13)

### Wales International Harp Competition

**Previous winners**
*Valeria Voshchennikova (2014), Elizaveta Kozina (2010), Eleanor Turner (2006)*
Talented harpists are the focus of this eight-year-old competition, held at Galeri Caernarfon as part of the quadrennial Wales International Harp Festival. Entry is open to harpists aged under 30, and prizes range from £1000 for the third-prize winner to £5000 for the first-prize winner.
**Next competition** 2018
**walesharpfestival.co.uk**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Metcalf** Paths of Song
**Philippa Davies** *fl* **David Campbell** *cl* **Nicola Thomas** *vc* **Eleanor Turner** *hp* **Solstice Quartet**, **Sacconi Quartet**
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD203 (12/10)

### Windsor Festival International String Competition

**Previous winners** *Benjamin Baker (2013), Yuki Ito (2011), Diana Galvydyte (2009), Brian O'Kane (2008)*
With a prize fund of more than £20,000, this competition is designed to boost the careers of exceptional string players. It was launched in 2008 in tribute to Sir Yehudi Menuhin and now takes place every two years during the Windsor Spring Festival. The first-prize winner is invited back to Windsor to perform a concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra and receives an opportunity to make a solo recording.
**Next competition** March 15-21, 2015
**wfinternationalstringcompetition.com**
**Previous winner's recording**
**'A Different World'** Contemporary works for violin and piano
**Diana Galvydyte** *vn*
**Christopher Guild** *pf*
Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD039


Sumi Hwang triumphs at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2014

### York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

**Previous winners** *Thalia Ensemble (2013), Profeti della Quinta (2011), Ensemble Meridiana (2009)*
This biennial competition, founded in 1985, invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles comprising a minimum of two musicians. Competing ensembles perform repertoire from any period from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, using historically informed playing techniques, instruments and stylistic conventions. The winners receive £1000, as well as opportunities to feature on BBC Radio 3's *The Early Music Show*, perform in a concert as part of the York Early Music Festival, and make a CD recording professionally produced by Linn Records.
**Next competition** July 9-11, 2015
**ncem.co.uk**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Telemann** Trio Sonatas
**Ensemble Meridiana**
Linn Ⓕ CKD368 (8/11)

## EUROPE

### International Chopin Competition

**Previous winners** *Yulianna Avdeeva (2010), Rafał Blechacz (2005), Yundi Li (2000), Martha Argerich (1965)*
Devoted entirely to the works of Fryderyk Chopin, this competition is held every five years in Warsaw. It was founded in 1927 by the Polish pianist and pedagogue Jerzy Żurawlew with the aim of helping young pianists at the start of their careers, and culminates in the presentation of monetary prizes ranging from €7000 to €30,000. There are also various special awards available.
**Next competition** October 2-23, 2015
**konkurs.chopin.pl**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Chopin** Polonaises Nos 1-7
**Rafał Blechacz** *pf*
DG Ⓕ 479 0928 (12/13)

### The Queen Elisabeth Competition

**Previous winners**
*Sumi Hwang (voice, 2014), Boris Giltburg (piano, 2013), Andrey Baranov (violin, 2012), Baiba Skride (violin, 2001), Nikolaj Znaider (violin, 1997), Vladimir Ashkenazy (piano, 1956), David Oistrakh (violin, 1937)*
Violinists, pianists, composers and singers who have completed their training can take part in this Brussels-based annual competition, founded in 1937. The awards range from €7000 for the sixth-prize winner, to €25,000, numerous concert opportunities, a CD recording and (for violinists) a loan of the 'Huggins' Stradivarius violin for the first-prize winner.
**Next competitions**
May 4-30, 2015 (violin), May 2-28, 2016 (piano)
**qeimc.be**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Schumann** Violin Concerto
**Baiba Skride** *vn*
**Danish National Symphony Orchestra / John Storgårds**
Sony Classical Ⓕ SK92938 (3/06)

### Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition

**Previous winners** *Kateryna Kasper (2014), Julia Lezhneva (2009), Elīna Garanča (1999), René Pape (1989)*
First held in 1984, this competition for young singers takes place every five years and is known for demanding a broad repertoire, including Baroque, Lieder and opera. There are two categories – one for men and one for women – and cash prizes range from €5000 to €30,000. Winners also receive engagements with institutions including the Finnish National Opera and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.
**Next competition** 2019
**mirjamhelin.fi**
**Previous winner's recording**
**'Alleluia'** Vocal Works
**Julia Lezhneva** *sop* **Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini**
Decca Ⓕ 478 5242DH (5/13)

### Lyons International Chamber Music Competition

**Previous winners** *Duo Tishchenko-Carr (2014), Duo Contraste (2013), Eburon Quintet (2012), Van Baerle Trio (2011)*
Chamber musicians aged under 30 can take part in this 10-year-old competition, which focuses each year on a different instrumental grouping. This year, for example, the spotlight was on violin and piano duos, while the 2015 competition will exclusively comprise string quartets. In addition to several professional engagements, the winners receive a cash prize of €10,000.
**Next competition** April 22-26, 2015
**cimcl.fr**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Loevendie. Ravel. Saint-Saëns** Piano Trios
**Van Baerle Trio**
Etcetera Ⓕ KTC1438 (10/12)

### Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition

**Previous winners** *Lahav Shani (2013), Ainārs Rubiķis (2010), Gustavo Dudamel (2004)*
This triennial competition was founded in 2004 by the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra with the aim of boosting the careers of conductors aged 35 and under. It consists of four rounds, for which participants prepare a range of set

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fax: +7-495-2483494

E-mail: info@competition-tchaikovsky.com
Website: www.competition-tchaikovsky.com

repertoire pieces, including several excerpts from Mahler's works. The public can attend the final two rounds, which culminate in the presentation of three cash prizes: €5000 for the third- and fourth-prize winners, €10,000 for the second-prize winner, and €20,000 for the first-prize winner, who may also receive engagements with several orchestras.

**Next competition** May 2016

**bambergsymphony.com**

**Previous winner's recording**

**Beethoven** Symphonies Nos 5 & 7 **Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel**
DG Ⓕ 477 6228 (11/06)

### Malko Competition for Young Conductors

**Previous winners** *Rafael Payare (2012), Joshua Weilerstein (2009), Mei-Ann Chen (2005), Josep Caballé Domenech (2001), Claus Peter Flor (1983)*

First held in 1965, this (usually) triennial competition was founded by the Danish Radio Symphony to honour the memory of its long-standing conductor Nikolai Malko. It is open to budding conductors from all over the world aged between 20 and 35, and takes place in Copenhagen over four rounds. There are six cash prizes available, ranging from €2000 to €20,000, and one winner receives concert engagements with several orchestras, including (in 2015) the Vienna Philharmonic. Next year's edition will bring the performance of a piece composed by the late conductor Lorin Maazel, who presided over this competition until his death earlier this year.

**Next competition** April 25 – May 1, 2015

**malkocompetition.com**

**Previous winner's recording**

**Dvořák** Symphony No 9, 'From the New World'. Czech Suite **Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra / Claus Peter Flor**
BIS Ⓕ BIS1856 (2/13)

### Carl Nielsen International Competition

**Previous winners** *Sébastian Jacot (flute, 2014), Olli Leppäniemi (clarinet, 2009), Adele Anthony (violin, 1996)*

This annual competition, founded in the late 1970s and taking place in the Odense concert hall in Denmark, runs in a series of rotating disciplines. This year's edition, for example, focused on flautists, whereas next year's spotlights organists. Entrants must be under 30 years old and the first-prize winner receives €12,000 as well as a concert with the Odense Symphony Orchestra and an opportunity to make a recording for Orchid Classics.

**Next competition** May 31 – June 9, 2015

**dr.dk/temaer/CarlNielsen2014eng**

**Previous winner's recording**

**Sarasate** Violin Works **Adele Anthony**, **Gil Shaham** *vns* **Akira Eguchi** *pf* **Castilla y León Symphony Orchestra / Alejandro Posada**
Canary Classics Ⓕ CC07 (1/10)

### International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition

**Previous winners** *Nikita Boriso-Glebsky (2010), Leonidas Kavakos (1985), Viktoria Mullova (1980)*

Violinists aged 30 and under take part in this highly prestigious competition, founded in 1965 (eight years after Sibelius's death) and held every five years in Helsinki. The final round, in which every competitor performs Sibelius's Violin Concerto and one more concerto, culminates in the presentation of three main awards: €12,000, €18,000 and €25,000 for the third-, second- and first-prize winners respectively.

**Next competition** November 22 – December 3, 2015

**sibeliuscompetition.fi**

**Previous winner's recording**

**Lalo** Symphonie espagnole. Violin Sonata. Arlequin. Guitare **Nikita Boriso-Glebsky** *vn* **Jean-Philippe Collard** *pf* **Sinfonia Varsovia / Augustin Dumay**
Fuga Libera Ⓕ FUG594 (4/13)

### Queen Sonja International Music Competition

**Previous winners** *Kristina Mkhitaryan (2013), Seung Gi Jung (2009), Audun Iversen (2007), Olga Mykytenko (2003)*

Taking place every second year in Oslo, this competition is open to singers from all over the world. So far, cash prizes have ranged from €1500 to €20,000, but these amounts will be significantly increased in 2015. International agents, artist managers and other music industry representatives are present at the final stages of the competition and prize winners are offered engagements with leading Norwegian musical institutions.

**Next competition** August 12-21, 2015

**qsimc.no**

**Previous winner's recording**

**Mozart** Le nozze di Figaro *Sols incl* **Audun Iversen** as Count Almaviva **Glyndebourne Chorus; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / Robin Ticciati**
Opus Arte Ⓜ ② DVD OA1102D; Ⓕ Blu-ray OABD7118D (8/13)

### International Tchaikovsky Competition

**Previous winners** *Daniil Trifonov (2011), Deborah Voigt (1990), Nathaniel Rosen (1978), Gidon Kremer (1970), Vladimir Ashkenazy (1962)*

This competition – launched in 1958 – is held every four years in Moscow and is aimed at violinists, pianists and cellists aged 16-30 and singers aged 19-32. Cash prizes from €3000 to €20,000 are awarded to the top five competitors in the violin, piano and cello categories and the top four in the men's and women's solo vocal categories.

**Next competition** June 15 – July 4, 2015

**competition-tchaikovsky.com**

**Previous winner's recording**

**'The Carnegie Recital' Daniil Trifonov** *pf*
DG Ⓕ 479 1728 (12/13)

## REST OF THE WORLD

### Banff International String Quartet Competition

**Previous winners** *Dover Quartet (2013), Jupiter Quartet (2004), Amernet Quartet (1995), Manfred Quartet (1989)*

Chamber musicians under 35 of all nationalities can take part in this 31-year-old triennial competition based in Canada's Rocky Mountains. Along with a cash prize of C$25,000, the first-prize winners receive four custom-made bows, a recording opportunity, coaching and mentorship with established artists and a paid concert engagement at the Esterházy Palace in Vienna.

**Next competition** August 29 – September 4, 2016

**banffcentre.ca**



Vadym Kholodenko wins the Cliburn

**Previous winner's recording**

**Beethoven** String Quartet No 16 **Mendelssohn** String Quartet No 6 **Jupiter Quartet**
Marquis Ⓕ MARQUIS81405 (1/12)

### Cleveland International Piano Competition

**Previous winners** *Stanislav Kristenko (2013), Martina Filjak (2009), Alexander Ghindin (2007)*

The first Cleveland International Piano Competition took place in 1975; in 1979 Jean-Yves Thibaudet took second prize, and last year's winner took third prize in 2005. After 15 days of competition and symposia the first-prize winner is awarded US$75,000, a debut recital at Carnegie Hall and a recording on the Steinway & Sons label.

**Next competition** July and August, 2016

**clevelandpiano.org**

**Previous winner's recording**

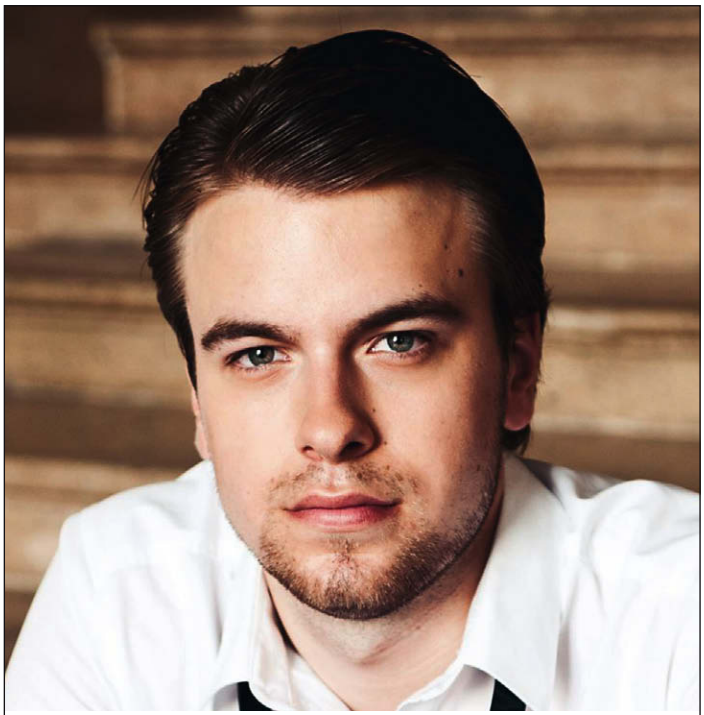
**Rachmaninov** Morceaux de fantaisie **Tchaikovsky** Piano Sonata **Alexander Ghindin** *pf*
Piano Classics Ⓕ PCL0044 (1/13)

### Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

**Previous winners** *Vadym Kholodenko (2013), Christian Zacharias (1973), Radu Lupu (1966)*

This quadrennial competition, first held in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1962, is open to pianists aged 18-30. It was originally organised by teachers from the Fort Worth area to honour the victory of the American pianist Van Cliburn, who had won the first ever International Tchaikovsky Competition. Cash prizes range from US$1000 to US$50,000, and the top three winners

PHOTOGRAPHY: CAROLYN CRUZ



## Matthias Winckhler

**Baritone**

**First Prize** International Mozart Competition Salzburg 2014
**Special Prize** German Schubert Society 2013

**Bach: *Christmas Oratorio* Bass**
Nederlandse Bachvereniging / Jos van Veldhoven
**10th December 2014** Kampen
**11th December 2014** Maastricht
**12th December 2014** Groningen
**13th December 2014** Tilburg
**14th December 2014** Den Haag
**15th December 2014** Rotterdam
**17th, 18th December 2014** Naarden
**20th December 2014** Haarlem
**21st December 2014** Eindhoven
**22nd December 2014** Amsterdam
**23rd December 2014** Utrecht

**Bach: *Saint Matthew Passion* Christ**
Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
**26th, 27th March 2015** Oslo Concert Hall

**Bach: *Saint Matthew Passion* Bass I, Christ**
Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki
**3rd April 2015** Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall
**4th April 2015** Tokorozawa (Saitama)

Dates subject to change. Photo: Shirley Suarez.

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*www.concoursgeneve.ch*

receive concert tours, along with the opportunity to make a live recording. There is also a concurrent competition for amateur pianists.
**Next competition** May 26 – June 11, 2017
**cliburn.org**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Rachmaninov. Medtner. Mendelssohn** Piano Works
**Vadym Kholodenko** *pf*
Delos Ⓕ DE3467 (6/14)

## Honens International Piano Competition

**Previous winners** *Pavel Kolesnikov (2012), Georgy Tchaidze (2009), Minsoo Sohn (2006), Xiang Zou (2003), Katherine Chi (2000), Maxim Philippov (1996), Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (1992)*
The philanthropist and music enthusiast Esther Honens founded this competition in 1991 to support the careers of young pianists. Now held every three years, in the Canadian city of Calgary, it offers its first-prize winner C$100,000 – the largest cash prize in the competition world – along with a three-year-long artistic and career development programme offering debut recital opportunities in several cities around the world and the production of a professional recording.
**Next competition** September 3-12, 2015
**honens.com**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Tchaikovsky** The Seasons
**Pavel Kolesnikov** *pf*
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68028 (8/14)

## International Violin Competition of Indianapolis

**Previous winners** *Jinjoo Cho (2014), Augustin Hadelich (2006), Barnabás Kelemen (2002)*
Every four years, music lovers focus their attention on the 'Indianapolis', a competition founded in 1982, under the artistic leadership of violinist Josef Gingold, to discover exceptional violinists. The overall winner of the competition, which takes place over the course of three rounds, receives US$30,000, and among the special prizes on offer is a gold-mounted Tourte-Viorin model Berg bow worth US$8000.
**Next competition** 2018
**violin.org**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Bartók** Violin Sonatas Nos 1 & 2. Solo Violin Sonata
**Barnabás Kelemen** *vn*
**Zoltán Kocsis** *pf*
Hungaroton Ⓕ
HSACD32515 (5/13)

## Aram Khachaturian International Competition

**Previous winners**
*Evgeny Starodubtsev and Anastasia Nesterova (piano, 2014), Pavel Milyukov and Tanabe Ayako (violin, 2012)*
Founded in 2003 to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Aram Khachaturian, this competition is aimed at young violinists, cellists and pianists. It takes place every year in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, and culminates in the presentation of cash prizes ranging from $2000 to $15,000. Participants perform a varied repertoire, which must include works by Khachaturian. Next year's edition focuses exclusively on violinists.
**Next competition** June 6-16, 2015
**akhic.am**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Stravinsky** Piano Sonata
**Szymanowski** Masques
**Evgeny Starodubtsev** *pf*
Honens Ⓕ 201102CD

## Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition

**Previous winners** *Amaryllis Quartet (2011), Trio Rafale (2011), Badke Quartet (2007), Atos Trio (2007)*
Held every four years since its creation in 1991, this quadrennial competition showcases some of the best young piano trios and string quartets in the world. Participants – all aged under 35 years – must prepare a work composed after 1995, a new Australian composition, a piece by either Haydn or Mozart, as well as music of their own choice. The total award fund is valued at over A$200,000, with winners receiving both cash prizes and touring opportunities.
**Next competition** July 11-19, 2015
**chambermusicaustralia.com.au**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Kurtág** Officium breve **Schumann** String Quartets Nos 1 & 3
**Amaryllis Quartet**
Genuin Ⓕ GEN13290 (2/14)

## Yehudi Menuhin International Competition for Young Violinists

**Previous winners** *Stephen Waarts (2014, senior), Rennosuke Fukuda (2014, junior), Alina Ibragimova (2000), Julia Fischer (1995), Tasmin Little (1985)*
This world-renowned biennial competition was founded by Yehudi Menuhin in 1983, for violinists aged under 22. So far the competition has taken place in cities including Beijing, Cardiff and Oslo, and in 2016 it returns to London for the first time since 2004, celebrating the centenary of Menuhin's birthday. Winners receive a range of concert and masterclass opportunities and cash prizes this year ranged from US$500 to US$10,000.
**Next competition** April 7-17, 2016
**menuhincompetition.org**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Khachaturian. Prokofiev. Glazunov** Violin Concertos
**Julia Fischer** *vn* **Russian National Orchestra / Yakov Kreizberg**
Pentatone Ⓕ
PTC 5186 059 (1/05)

## Montreal International Music Competition

**Previous winners** *Jayson Gilham (piano, 2014), Marc Bouchkov (violin, 2013), Philippe Sly (voice, 2012)*
First held in Montreal, Canada, in 2002, this annual competition targets violinists, pianists and singers, featured on a rotating basis over a three-year cycle. The three main cash prizes range from C$10,000 to C$30,000 and one finalist also receives engagements with institutions such as Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Jeunesses Musicales du Canada.
**Next competition** May 25 – June 5, 2015 (voice)
**concoursmontreal.ca**
**Previous winner's recording**
**'Love's Minstrels'** English Songs from the 19th and 20th Centuries
**Philippe Sly** *bass-bar*
**Michael McMahon** *pf*
Analekta Ⓕ AN2 9967 (A/14)

## Osaka International Chamber Music Competition & Festa

**Previous winners** *Trio Rafale (2014), Arcadia Quartet (2014), Attacca Quartet (2011), Morphing Quartet (2011), Doric String Quartet (2008), Dali Piano Trio (2008)*
This triennial music competition, launched in 1993, spotlights promising chamber musicians aged 16-35. It takes place in Osaka's Izumi Hall, with participants performing a range of classical and set contemporary works.
Top prize winners receive concert tours of Japan, as well as ¥3m (£17,600) presented at a special awards ceremony. The Festa component of the competition, in which mixed ensembles perform a range of classical, traditional and popular works, runs alongside.
**Next competition** May 2017
**jcmf.or.jp/en**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Schumann** Three String Quartets
**Doric String Quartet**
Chandos Ⓕ CHAN10692 (12/11)


Stephen Waarts wins the Menuhin

## Unisa Music Competition

**Previous winners**
*Matvey Demin (flute, 2014), Sang Yoon Kim (clarinet, 2014), Lukáš Vondráček (piano, 2012)*
The University of South Africa (UNISA), based in Pretoria, has been presenting international music contests on an annual basis since 1982, but this year it held its inaugural flute and clarinet competition. The total prize money was ZAR890,000 (US$89,000), and successful applicants received a return flight ticket to South Africa as well as free accommodation with host families.
**Next competition** July 11-18, 2015 (piano)
**unisa.ac.za**
**Previous winner's recording**
**Prokofiev** Piano Sonata No 7
**Rachmaninov** Corelli Variations
**Lukáš Vondráček** *pf*
TwoPianists Ⓕ TP1039176

PHOTOGRAPHY: LAWRENCE PEART

**KEY TO SYMBOLS**

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| | | Ⓗ | Historic | **oas** | only available separately |

**Editor's Choice**
Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Recording of the Month

Peter Quantrill listens to a vivid live recording of Schumann's troubled Faust cantata

## Schumann

Szenen aus Goethes Faust, WoO3
**Christiane Karg, Mari Eriksmoen** *sops* **Bernarda Fink** *mez* **Andrew Staples** *ten* **Christian Gerhaher** *bar* **Alastair Miles, Kurt Rydl, Tareq Nazmi** *basses*
**Soloists and Chamber Choir of the Augsburger Domsingknaben; Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Daniel Harding**
BR-Klassik Ⓕ ② 900122 (116' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich, January 18 & 19, 2013




*'Christian Gerhaher is more intimate with us and with Goethe than on Harnoncourt's recording, even besting his teacher Fischer-Dieskau'*

Since Benjamin Britten broke a lance for it in 1973, *Scenes from Goethe's Faust* has not suffered from the choral-society stolidity that used to weigh down the many charms of *The Paradise and the Peri*, Schumann's other evening-length choral work. Daniel Harding did *Peri* first, and then conducted *Faust* with 'his' Swedish radio orchestra in 2010.

This experience all tells to the good. Past the blocky formalities of the Overture (composed last, in 1853), it's quickly apparent how text-driven and song-soaked is this marvellous live recording. When people criticised Schumann's orchestral music, they were criticising him for not being Beethoven or Brahms. Whether or not the Bavarian radio orchestra is at full strength – and the cathedral scene of the first part lacks nothing in impact, led by Alastair Miles at his most stentorian as the Evil Spirit – they play with the easy mobility of a chamber group, reduced but not minimal vibrato and the dynamic restraint needed to register Schumann's particular orchestral *tinta* with its emphasis on wind and brass at the extremes of their registers: the high piccolos and low trombones used not to represent superficial heaven/hell polarities but as a scenic backdrop (after Mendelssohn's example in *The Hebrides*, and prefiguring *Gurrelieder* in this regard), lending perspective to Faust, the baritone in the centre of the picture. The German oratorio tradition seems less relevant to both piece and recording than the late canvases of Turner such as *The Great Western Railway*, in which man stands at the edge of abstraction, as if setting Goethe's words for Faust's death. In Harding's chorale-like chord-placing of the sublime orchestral epilogue to Part 2, we may hear both the Bach evoked by Schumann as he substitutes Goethe's 'Es ist vorbei' for the biblical echoes of 'Es ist vollbracht', and, in its aching suspensions, Mahler the songsmith. Gerhaher contends that this substitution shows how Faust has been canonised by Schumann, and calls up cross-motifs in the Chorus Mysticus as supporting evidence, but I hear more musical than religious motivation in the *opus summum* of a composer whose faith was anything but steadfast or conventional.

As Faust, Christian Gerhaher is more intimate with us and with Goethe than on Harnoncourt's recording, even (this may be heresy for some) besting his teacher Fischer-Dieskau, who had such feeling for and experience of this role. Besides the philosopher-king side of the character, with which Gerhaher shows himself intellectually at home in a fascinating interview reprinted in the booklet, he has at his disposal the charm of the teasing lover as he banters in the garden with Christiane Karg's Gretchen. His 'Lebt wohl' at the end of this scene is a small masterpiece of regret, ardour, bravado and hope, as rich in nuance as a fine Marschallin's 'Ja ja'. Backed by some pointful conducting and beautifully dovetailed playing of Gretchen's stock confession scene, Karg brings to it a softer, more yielding but less personal vocal profile than the piercing tremulousness of Elizabeth Harwood for Britten.

Harding's tripping pulse and tenderly drawn *legato* is ideal for the twilit prelude



Setting the scene: Daniel Harding rehearsing the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra at the Herkulessaal, Munich

to Part 2; and while he doesn't quite conjure the Mendelssohnian magic of Abbado, he has Andrew Staples (the tenor for his *Peri* performances), who as Ariel sustains an elevated line and mood better than the slightly stiff approach of Werner Güra for Harnoncourt and the curiously miscast Wagnerian tenor Endrik Wottrich for Abbado. The smaller roles are all well taken but in parts such as the midnight *scherzo* it is the orchestra who say even more than the singers, with many subtle variations of string vibrato and wind colour. At the centre of Part 2 is Faust's wondering hymn to nature's glories, and this finds Gerhaher at his finest, using consonants to spring across phrases like stones in a brook.

Considering the *Scenes* have no narrative thread to speak of, it might even be thought useful to listen to them as Schumann composed them, backwards, for the third part, begun in 1844, breathes an air of sustained inspiration scarcely less rarefied than the second part of *Peri* from the previous year. The narrative flow imparted by Harding (and Schumann) is even more evident and admirable, however, if the solemn, *Rhenish* prelude to Part 3 is heard in the light of the end of Part 2. Here the chorus breaks free from call-and-response conventions, happily given due prominence in the warm Herkulessaal acoustic and well balanced across the parts so we can relish Schumann's hovering, sixth-tinted harmonies. The boys from Augsburg are, indeed, as 'blessed' as Goethe commands, bright, fragile and perfectly tuned.

When the Chorus Mysticus is reached, Schumann's apotheosis – kept flowing and light-filled by Harding – does make Mahler's setting in the Eighth feel as overblown as his detractors would have you believe. Here are no suns and planets revolving but a human soul finding rest. Talking of Schumann, Gerhaher remarks that 'this is a version of *Faust* one can really indulge in'. Of this performance, I can only echo his sentiments. G

*Selected comparisons:*
*Britten (12/73R) (DECC) 476 1548PR2 or 478 5672DC27*
*Abbado (5/95R) (SONY) 88697 71282-2*
*Harnoncourt (1/10) (RCO) RCO09001*

## Listening points Your guide to the most memorable moments

**Disc 1, track 4: Scene in the Cathedral**
Schumann at his most violent and abrupt, the Cologne Cathedral of the Third Symphony invaded by the nihilistic terrorist of 'Ich grolle nicht'.

**Disc 1, track 6: 'Thäler grünen, Hügel schwellen'**
Valleys and hills, waves and harvests: the German Romantic chorus *in excelsis* following the example of Haydn's *The Seasons*.

**Disc 2, track 2: 'Ewiger Wonnebrand'**
A duet for Andrew Staples and the BRSO's Principal Cellist, brief, fresh and exhilarating.

**Disc 2, track 7: 'Hier ist die Aussicht frei'**
Against a quartet accompaniment with a striking debt to Beethoven's Op 132, Gerhaher dons the more flowing vocal robes of Doctor Marianus to hymn Goethe's Eternal Feminine.

**Disc 2, track 8: 'Dir, der Unberührbaren'**
A gently longing duet for Mari Eriksmoen and Bernarda Fink, perfectly attuned to each other as songful penitents and light relief from the steadily broader and more purple vision of Goethe's conclusion and Schumann's transfiguration.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER MEISEL

# Orchestral



Mike Ashman listens to Grieg's Holbergs reimagined three times: *'We are really in a land of improvisation with little pre-planned and nothing written down'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 45



Edward Seckerson on an astute Mahler symphony from Cologne: *'It is as if Saraste is placing all his Mahlerian credentials on the line in that one passage'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 48

## Beethoven

Symphonies – No 2, Op 36; No 8, Op 93
**Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique / John Eliot Gardiner**
Soli Deo Gloria Ⓕ SDG721 (56' • DDD)
Recorded live at Cadogan Hall, London, November 30, 2013

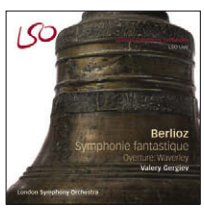



Sir John Eliot Gardiner directs a more or less exemplary account of Beethoven's Second Symphony. The outer movements are swift-moving without being overdriven; textures are lean, detail is pertinent. An exquisitely judged account of the lyric slow movement and a properly weighted reading of the *Scherzo* complete one's pleasure. The reading is similar to Gardiner's earlier one with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique (Archiv, 11/94). The principal difference, aside from extensive changes of orchestral personnel, is that the performance was recorded live in Cadogan Hall. This boasts a cleaner, less reverberant acoustic than the Great Hall in Blackheath which was used for the 1991 studio recording. The end of the Cadogan Hall performance electrifies as the earlier one didn't quite do and there is a marginally more easeful way with the introductory *Adagio*.

Gardiner's high-speed performance of the Eighth Symphony is less of a success. The players gabble the quavers in the opening four-bar summons, to which Gardiner now adds an unmarked *diminuendo* on the final uprush – as odd as an actor dropping his voice at the end of the opening line of John Donne's 'Busie old foole, unruly Sunne'. Such details notwithstanding, the outer movements show Gardiner at his most remorseless. The second movement is wittily done but elsewhere there appears to be scant recognition of the fact that this mighty symphony is essentially a work of comic genius, the Dionysiac Seventh's jesting stablemate. Having given this hard-driven affair a couple of hearings, I took down from the shelves Sir Thomas Beecham's 1951 RPO recording of the Eighth (Columbia, 9/53). Now there's a performance. **Richard Osborne**

## Berlioz

Symphonie fantastique, Op 14.
Overture 'Waverley', Op 1
**London Symphony Orchestra / Valery Gergiev**
LSO Live Ⓢ ② (SACD + BD) LSO0757
(66' • DDD/DSD • DTS-HD MA5.1)
Recorded live at the Barbican, London, October 31 & November 14, 2013




At first sight it seems strange that LSO Live should be revisiting this repertoire after the remarkable success of a Berlioz series with Sir Colin Davis which not only raised the label's international profile but may even be seen to have changed the nature of the record industry. That said, Davis's oft-praised LSO Live account of the *Symphonie fantastique* was made as long ago as September 2000. Nor should we forget that Gergiev's enthusiasm for Berlioz predates his involvement with the LSO. Philips recorded a Gergiev *Symphonie fantastique* with the Vienna Philharmonic in 2003 having previously taped their third (!) Davis version, with the same orchestra, in 1991.

Gergiev is more generous with repeats these days and this new package is more bountiful in other respects too. The conventional jewel-case houses two discs: the now customary hybrid SACD plus a novel Blu-ray disc containing both a Pure Audio audiophile alternative and a complete filmed performance of the main work (the rendition of November 14, 2013). Despite relatively limited camera angles, there are plentiful close-ups of the toothpick-wielding maestro, more selective views of his players (including the antiphonally placed violins) and a taste of the concluding applause otherwise excluded. Absent from all formats is the platform protest preceding the earlier of the two Barbican Hall dates credited as providing source material for the audio versions. The conductor is a controversial figure these days, although rarely for the right reasons.

What matters here is that this live recording preserves personalised music-making of real distinction. If the opening movements feel a little undercooked, Gergiev's distinctive brand of theatrical intensity builds as the narrative unfolds. The 'Scene in the Country' features much uncommonly sensitive woodwind phrasing, while the 'March to the Scaffold' moves forwards quite swiftly but with rigour and menace. Bar for bar, the 'Dream of a Witches' Sabbath' is certainly more viscerally exciting and driven than Sir Colin's. Whether it provides the same kind of symphonic inevitability and/or dreamy poetic truth is of course a moot point but you don't turn to Gergiev for the finer points. The *Waverley* Overture is similarly rousing. With the LSO in such fine fettle, the only disincentive is the airless acoustic typical of its home base. My advice would be: play loud or not at all. **David Gutman**

*Symphonie fantastique – selected comparison:*
*LSO, C Davis (5/01) (LSO) LSO0007*

## Brahms

Symphonies – No 3, Op 90[a]; No 4, Op 98[b]
**London Symphony Orchestra / Valery Gergiev**
LSO Live Ⓜ (SACD) LSO0737 (77' • DDD/DSD)
Recorded live at the Barbican, London, December [a]11 & 18, [b]12 & 19, 2012




Brahms and Gergiev could hardly be described as natural bedfellows but there were moments in the Third Symphony where the illicitness of unnatural bedfellows generated a certain frisson. Not so the Fourth, which is lamentable and quite one of the worst performances I've ever heard of the piece.



Chamber Bruckner: Ivor Bolton conducts his Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra in a lean performance of Bruckner's First Symphony

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER

At least the Third demonstrates resilience and muscularity, and in the vaulting and all-important theme of the first movement an undeniable sweep, relaxing most invitingly into the mellifluous clarinet of the second subject. But when one considers the recent revelations of Riccardo Chailly's Award-winning cycle, one wakes up to the critical difference that where Gergiev is merely pointing up the age-old romantic view of Brahms, Chailly is exploring its rigour and radicalism. So Gergiev's over-emphatic *rubatos* and over-egged dramatics sound hackneyed, with the *allegros* of the outer movements feeling sweaty and exhausting where Chailly is exhilarating. I think of British Rail's attribution to the wrong kind of snow: this is the wrong kind of romanticism. The third movement's *poco allegretto* (*poco*?) sounds languid and soupy, and maybe even a little wishful of finding a place in a Tchaikovsky ballet.

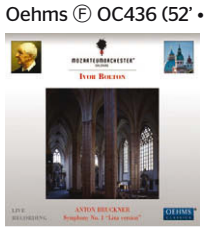
The Fourth is not even inappropriate but rather enervating and lifeless, with a first movement that displays a total lack of uplift and engagement; the tentative exposition is disappointing from a world-class orchestra. The glorious second movement sounds plodding and uningratiating, with even Gergiev's grunting failing to encourage uplift in its loftiest pages. At least there's a touch of *giocoso* about the *scherzo*; but, following one of Gergiev's signature *attaccas* into the finale (why in this case?), the most inspirational movement of the piece is episodic rather than evolving. But Gergiev had lost me in the first movement.

**Edward Seckerson**

*Selected comparison:*
*Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly (10/13) (DECC) 478 7471DX3*

## Bruckner

Symphony No 1 (Linz version, 1865/66, rev 1877)
**Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra / Ivor Bolton**
Oehms Ⓔ OC436 (52' • DDD)



Ivor Bolton makes a convincingly grand case for Bruckner's First as a work of innovative maturity, with no less experience behind its formal novelties than Brahms's own first remaining essay in the genre. The opening movement's steady opening tread has a weight and purpose that almost carries through to the culminating power of its *Tannhäuser* theme (at 3'25", given full value by the Mozarteum brass), only slightly arrested by the kind of rhetorically square and unmarked intake of breath that also spoils the movement's dash to the line.

In like manner, a solidly implacable pulse dominates the *Scherzo*, notwithstanding textural insertions such as string accents also to be heard on Abbado's various recordings. (This one, incidentally, is no less wrongly labelled than most of its rivals. It represents the 1877 revision of the 1865/66 original, which is still only available in versions conducted by Georg Tintner and Gerd Schaller). The pay-off comes in a spacious and unusually cogent balancing of the finale's contrasting episodes, launched by the trombones with a force worthy of the equivalent moment in Beethoven's C minor symphony.

In size (small), tonal balance (brassy), vibrato (lean) and matters of articulation, the Mozarteum orchestra is closer to Mario Venzago's Tapiola Sinfonietta (CPO) than Karajan's Berlin Phil; Bolton's direction of them, the reverse. This makes for an impressively elegiac *Adagio*, at once austere in phrasing and undernourished in sound. In that sense it reflects the contradictions with which the composer himself was sufficiently uncomfortable to produce the 1891 'Vienna' revision when he should have been getting on with the Ninth.

**Peter Quantrill**

## Clementi

Piano Concerto, Op 33 No 3[a]. Minuetto pastorale, WO36. Symphonies, Op 18 – No 1; No 2

**[a]Bruno Canino** *pf* **Rome Symphony Orchestra / Francesco La Vecchia**

Naxos Ⓑ 8 573273 (58' • DDD)




The single extant piano concerto of Clementi is this C major Concerto, and it survives only in a copy in the hand of Johann Schenk, one of Beethoven's teachers. Clementi converted it into a more saleable solo sonata, his Op 33 No 3 (not No 1 as Naxos's booklet has it), which you can hear on a superb recording by Howard Shelley (Vol 4 of the complete Clementi sonatas – Hyperion, 12/09) which captures not only the ideal piano sound for these works but also and more importantly the spirit of the piece.

The Italian players are placed in the audibly empty Auditorium di Via Conciliazione, Rome, as though for a concert to which no one has turned up. This may have indeed been the case, judging from the performance. Clementi's first-movement *Allegro con spirito* is more *allegro con malvolentieri*, which does nothing for a work that lacks the thematic attractions of other C major concertos such as K467 and K503 (composed about a decade earlier) or Beethoven's Op 15. The attractive rondo goes some way to making amends.

In a second and far better acoustic, Rome's OSR Studio, the Rome SO present two brief (roughly 16'30") four-movement symphonies from 1787. With Haydn's and Mozart's symphonies widely disseminated by then, it seems strange that Clementi, hailed as a 'transitional composer', should have reverted to the earlier Mannheim style, leaving us with eight short movements devoid of any striking originality or memorable ideas. Of course it is always interesting to know what was going on in the foothills of Olympus but Clementi the symphonist on this showing is thin gruel indeed.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## Dallapiccola

Partita[a]. Due Pezzi. Piccola musica notturna. Variazioni. Three Questions with Two Answers

**[a]Arantza Ezenarro** *sop*

**Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz / Karl-Heinz Steffens**

Capriccio Ⓕ C5214 (67' • DDD)




As Christoph Schlüren points out in his informative booklet-note, orchestral music occupies a limited place within Dallapiccola's output – making it relatively straightforward to assemble those of his maturity on to a single disc. Earliest and most wide-ranging is the *Partita* (1932) with which he made his debut as a composer equally beholden to the panache of Respighi or Casella as to the searchings of Busoni or Malipiero. Karl-Heinz Steffens takes an incisive yet never insensitive course across its initial three movements, culminating in a lyrical threnody whose Marian text (inexplicably not printed here) is affectingly sung by Arantza Ezenarro.

Of the remaining works, two are orchestrations of the most recreative kind. Thus *Due Pezzi* (1947) changes miniatures for violin and piano into a diptych where inward rumination and propulsive energy uneasily co-exist, while *Variazioni* (1952) even more radically transforms the pithy piano studies of *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera* into a varied though cumulative sequence of Webernian austerity leavened by a very Italianate finesse. No less masterly is *Piccola musica notturna* (1954), its introspection riven by eruptive outbursts in a miniature of arresting poise. Ostensibly a satellite of Dallapiccola's magnum opus, the opera *Ulisse*, *Three Questions with Two Answers* (1962) typifies the refined intensity of his late works – its speculative contrasts allowing for no easy resolution as the music dissolves into silence.

Throughout the disc, the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie's playing is ideally attuned to this music's ever more elusive idiom. Those who have Gianandrea Noseda's accounts of these pieces (and several others) will find Steffens's readings less forcefully projected or opulently recorded, yet no less satisfying. Coming after the fine release of Bernd Alois Zimmermann (11/14), this is a no less recommendable instalment in Capriccio's 'Modern Times' series. **Richard Whitehouse**

*Due Pezzi, Piccola musica, Variazioni – selected comparisons:*
*BBC PO, Noseda (12/04) (CHAN) CHAN10258*
*Partita, Three Questions – selected comparisons:*
*Keith, BBC PO, Noseda (5/10) (CHAN) CHAN10561*

## Debussy

La mer. Images. Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune

**Singapore Symphony Orchestra / Lan Shui**

BIS Ⓕ BIS1837 (77' • DDD/DSD)




The Singapore Symphony Orchestra, which has been associated most recently on disc with its series of Rachmaninov symphonies coupled with concerted works in collaboration with Yevgeny Sudbin, here applies itself with notable sensibility, energy and colouristic finesse to some core Debussy. There is no shortage of this repertoire in the catalogue, and indeed only recently Hännsler released finely tuned Stuttgart Symphony Orchestra performances of *Images* and *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* conducted by Heinz Holliger. Those were allied to some of Debussy's works featuring solo wind instruments, whereas the Singapore orchestra under Lan Shui go for *La mer*, a work they also recorded seven years ago in the context of a CD called 'Seascapes' alongside other maritime pieces by Zhou Long, Frank Bridge and Glazunov.

Nevertheless, this new version fits snugly into an all-Debussy programme, revealing as it does a genuine feel for the music's fluidity of pulse and shading together with its mix of mysterious mists and gusty surges. The atmosphere is well conjured up, the palette of instrumental colours aptly deployed. By the stopwatch this *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* is fractionally faster than Holliger's by only a matter of about 20 seconds but it feels slower: the languor here is not so much seductive as sleepy, and there are times in *Images*, too, where the clarity of definition in Holliger's performance lends the music a more scintillating gleam and transparency of texture. However, there is plenty of character to these stylistically astute Singapore performances.

**Geoffrey Norris**

*Images, Prélude – selected comparison:*
*Stuttgart RSO, Holliger (A/14) (HANS) CD93 315*

## Dvořák

Symphony No 8, Op 88 B163. Legends, Op 59 B122

**Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / José Serebrier**

Warner Classics Ⓕ 2564 62878-7 (77' • DDD)




Good as it is in part, José Serebrier's 2014 Bournemouth Symphony Dvořák Eighth can't compare with the last version I reviewed for *Gramophone*, Manfred ▸

**GRAMOPHONE** *Collector*

# HOLBERGS REIMAGINED

**Mike Ashman** listens to three contemporary takes on the Norwegian master's endearing recollection of Baroque dance forms – and more



New generation Grieg: 1B1 orchestra at home in the Konserthus, Stavanger

Grieg's innovative bicentennial tribute to Ludvig Holberg, Norwegian writer/philosopher/historian and fellow son of Bergen, is not a set of variations of one musical theme but of 18th-century dance forms – Sarabande, Gavotte/Musette, Air and Rigaudon. Existing itself in versions for piano (the first) and string orchestra, Grieg's Op 40, *From Holberg's Time – Suite in the Old Style*, has been adapted frequently for other instrumentations, trumpet, recorders and accordion among them.

Two of the three recent recordings discussed here take Grieg into the post-modern era of what composer/performer **Erlend Skomsvoll**, prime mover of a new version on the Simax recording, calls 'recomprimprovariations'. Working with the young, experimental Stavanger 1B1 orchestra, Skomsvoll's *Holberg Variations* takes the form of a jazzy jam around much of the musical material of Grieg's suite, Skomsvoll himself on solo piano, the orchestra, featuring several players as soloists, as his band.

'Praeluderies' runs more than twice the length of Grieg's original Praeludium and tries out a gamut of possibilities. It is clear that we really are in a land of improvisation with little pre-planned and nothing written down until it's been tried a few times. After the piano has skitted in over Grieg's opening in a style (appropriately) suggestive of Jacques Loussier's 'Play Bach', we enter bolder areas – the mixing desk drops the ensemble right down while piano and double bass enter a spacey groove not unlike the Grateful Dead's 'Dark Star'. Beethoven cadenzas are a surprising but apt influence as the tone returns to the decidedly 'classical'.

'Sarabond', again longer (and slower) than the original, gains something of the feel of a blues movement, while 'Gavotterised' has enough mock Scottish folk intros and twirls to suggest that Skomsvoll is familiar with both *Brigadoon* and Walton's *Façade*. 'Airsm' is appropriately jazz-Bach with an intriguingly dark B section on lower strings featuring a viola player reading a sailing article in Norwegian and ensemble humming. Skomsvoll then lets himself go on 'Rigandarchy' – for once shorter than its source – with some of the decoration from which he's restrained himself so far. A tight, well-judged performance with a neat rounding-up of this version of the score.

The remainder of the Simax disc gives us the Grieg as scripted, so to speak, including a straight, strong reading of the piano original, well balanced by the pianist's hands and feet (try especially 'Rigaudon') to avoid Romantic excess. Much the same might be said of the orchestra's own string version, which is also careful to avoid the artificial churchy fat that can creep into 'Air'.

Complaining that the 63 different versions of the piece that he has found on Spotify have 'no deviations from the score, everything played as written', engineer **Mats Claesson** follows a Wendy Carlos approach to the music in a creative reconstruction using samples of acoustic instruments from the Vienna Symphony Library. 'My version has no intention of being a "sound alike"…my aim is to be both creative and challenging, expressing a new perspective for you on how the *Holberg Suite* might be played with persistent practice and adequate rehearsal time.'

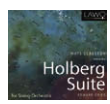
Early on in Claesson's work there's an intriguing suggestion of how the Grieg could sound played on 'original' instruments of Holberg's time. But the relentless timbre of the digitally sampled strings becomes wearing. As the Suite goes on (especially in 'Air' and 'Rigaudon') – and sonorities are recreated in blocks – the aural impression becomes that of listening to a prepared keyboard of limited colour range. Like Skomsvoll but with less spark, Claesson does not resist decorating 'Air', where his bass re-creations add a horror-film like churchy fat of their own. The only 'new perspective' (Claesson's programme note) opened up is on how this realiser personally hears the music.

The young **Ensemble Allegria** let their string version introduce a recital of 20th-century Norwegian string works, which actually emphasises the often forward-looking 1880s setting of Grieg's Baroque dances. For the Allegrias, in a fluent and clean-limbed performance of the *Holberg*, it is also some revenge on the critic who described their debut performance of the work as 'scruffy'. What follows makes an intriguing and rarely heard programme. The Kvandal Sonata will remind listeners of Bartók with its angular string-writing and discords prefacing emotional, folk-like melodies. Grüner-Hegge, better known as a conductor although he was a composer first, contributes a sad string elegy in the tradition of 'Åse's Lament' by Grieg. The 'modern tonality' (his own phrase) of now 99-year-old Knut Nystedt provides a rather brutal Shostakovich-like portrait of icy Northern wastes. G

## THE RECORDINGS



**Grieg/Skomsvoll** Holberg Vars
**Hadland, Skomsvoll; 1B1**
Simax Ⓕ PSC1332




**Grieg/Claesson** Holberg Suite
**Claesson**
LAWO Classics Ⓕ LWC1047



**Grieg** Holberg Suite, etc
**Ens Allegria**
LAWO Classics Ⓕ LWC1044

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER ADAMIK

Les Arts Florissants
WILLIAM CHRISTIE
ÉDITIONS

## NEW RELEASE

*December 2014*




AF004 - 1 CD

### George Frideric HANDEL
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**WILLIAM CHRISTIE**
**Soloists: TIM MEAD, SEAN CLAYTON, LISANDRO ABADIE**
**Including a new short story by DOUGLAS KENNEDY**

*The King shall rejoice* - **Coronation Anthem**
**HWV 260 (1727)**

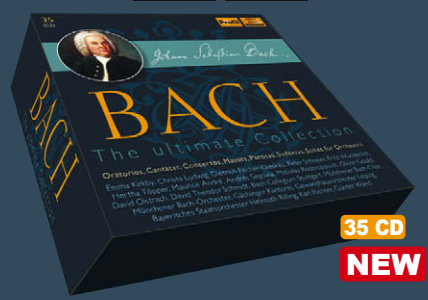
*Te Deum* **in D major "***Queen Caroline***"**
**HWV 280 (1714)**

*The ways of Zion do mourn*
**Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline**
**HWV 264 (1737)**

The wife of George II of England, a woman of great beauty and a defender of both science and the arts, Caroline of Ansbach was also a patron and close friend of Handel. This recording brings together three of the composer's works written for the major royal ceremonies which marked the life of Caroline from her arrival in England to her funeral.

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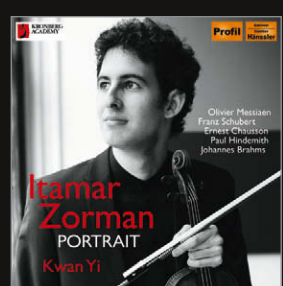

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*WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln · Jukka-Pekka Saraste*
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Honeck's superbly played production with the Pittsburgh Symphony from the previous year. The symphony's slow opening provides one or two telling clues; for example, the expressive way Honeck allows the melody to fall away as the musical sentence draws to a close. Although Serebrier is sensitive to musical line, his handling of the same passage sounds prosaic by comparison. Beyond that small detail, there's the flexibility of Pittsburgh's lead flute, the excitement of Honeck's transition into the main *Allegro*, the warmth of the cellos thereafter and Honeck's always vivid phrase-shaping. Hardly a bar goes by that hasn't been painstakingly pondered in relation to the bar that follows. Serebrier's *Allegro* is far less *con brio* than Honeck's, though there may well be some listeners who prefer his more genial approach. Under his guidance the music unfolds naturally, unselfconsciously, and in well-balanced sound.

The *Adagio* is in general nicely judged, with some telling points worth noting such as the viola *pizzicatos* beneath solo violin at 3'33". But in the darkened second half of the movement, the sudden increase in tempo at 7'16" jars and at 7'51", once calm has been restored, the strings aren't entirely together. Then again, I enjoyed Serebrier's swift but amiable *Allegretto grazioso*, with its cleanly audible winds and consistently transparent textures. The finale, like the first movement, is animated without catching fire, the performance as a whole nicely played and well recorded but hardly a highlight of this generally excellent series.

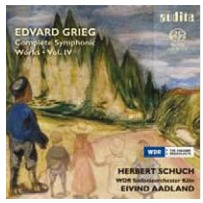
The 10 *Legends*, on the other hand, have that very narrative quality that Serebrier, in his useful booklet-note, claims for the symphony, 10 stories in miniature, affectionately handled. Try No 6 for size with its lovingly played central section, paced more broadly than most but very effective at Serebrier's chosen tempi, or the gorgeous No 8 with its imaginatively gauged shifts in mood and pulse. This is Serebrier's Dvořák at its best. The symphony comes close, but not close enough for an unqualified recommendation.

**Rob Cowan**

*Symphony No 8 – selected comparison:*
*Pittsburgh SO, Honeck (A/14) (REFE) FR710SACD*

## Grieg

'Complete Symphonic Works, Vol 4'
Piano Concerto, Op 16[a]. Symphony in C minor
[a]**Herbert Schuch** *pf* **WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Eivind Aadland**
Audite Ⓕ AUDITE92 670 (63' • DDD/DSD)




'Must never be performed' is an obvious red rag to any musical bull and although Grieg's youthful C minor Symphony reveals numerous influences, some more obvious than others, it's confidently built, thematically appealing and mildly memorable in a way that recalls similarly derivative early symphonic works by Dvořák and Glazunov. Its first recording, by the Bergen Symphony Orchestra under Karsten Andersen, is now out on Decca Eloquence (appropriately coupled with Goldmark's equally engaging *Rustic Wedding* Symphony), and shares the market with worthy versions under Ari Rasilainen, Okko Kamu, Terje Mikkelsen and Neeme Järvi. Up until now I would probably have rated the latter as top contender but this newcomer from Eivind Aadland and the Cologne WDR Symphony Orchestra, which is captured in admirably natural sound and appears in the context of Grieg's 'Complete Symphonic Works, Vol 4', is a fresh, lightly sprung performance that avoids any inappropriate feelings of portentousness and highlights the mazurka-style third movement as the most characteristic in terms of its thematic material.

A good idea to couple Grieg's least familiar orchestral work with its totally familiar near contemporary, the A minor Piano Concerto, in a not insubstantial reading by the excellent Herbert Schuch, who sounds as if he's worked over every semiquaver with infinite care. Not that the performance lacks spontaneity, more that inner voices, crisp rhythms and a sculpted brand of poetry suggest a truly 'settled' interpretation, one that happily compares with (but hardly replaces) the best available. Again Aadland and his Cologne players provide an excellent account of the orchestral score, supportive of Schuch and distinctive on its own terms, and the recorded balance is excellent.

**Rob Cowan**

*Symphony – selected comparison:*
*Gothenburg SO, N Järvi (6/89[R]) (DG) 471 300-2GB6*

## Grime

Virga[a]. Into the faded air[b]. Clarinet Concerto[c]. A Cold Spring[b]. Everyone Sang[d]. Night Songs[d]. Near Midnight[a]
[c]**Lynsey Marsh** *cl* / **Hallé** [bc]**Soloists** / [a]**Sir Mark Elder**, [bcd]**Jamie Phillips**
NMC Debut Discs Ⓕ NMCD199 (71' • DDD)




In the six years since she first came to prominence, Helen Grime (*b*1981) has gone on to write several further works for orchestra and ensemble, so making this disc a more than usually inclusive overview of her output to date. *Virga* has had a number of high-profile hearings, underlining the resourcefulness with which its initially intricate textures open out to reveal an unadorned violin line whose evolution also brings a transformed reprise of earlier material. This process of change and return is further refined in the string sextet *Into the faded air*, with its dextrous interplay of duos and trios, while continuous development cuts across the three movements of the Clarinet Concerto with its improvisatory central cadenza leading to an otherworldly finale.
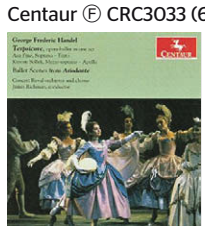
A *concertante* aspect is more obliquely evident in *A Cold Spring*, with horn emerging as first among equals in the luminous central movement, whereas the remaining pieces are all through-composed designs that draw on larger forces. *Everyone Sang* unfolds as multiple elaborations of its initial melody towards a chorale-like apotheosis, then *Night Songs* focuses on contrast between its twin melodic lines as affords the most equivocal of resolutions. Most impressive is *Near Midnight*, with its strangely amorphous activity – made audible through the assured orchestral handling – as amply evokes the fatalistic poem by DH Lawrence that inspired it.

The performances are a tribute to the dedication of the Hallé players, whether in orchestral or ensemble guise, and have all been recorded with the spaciousness and immediacy which this music needs. Detailed notes and striking booklet artwork enhance a strong recommendation.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Handel

Terpsicore. Ariodante – Ballet Music
**Ava Pine, Nell Snaidas** *sops* **Kirsten Sollek** *mez*
**Concert Royal Chorus and Orchestra / James Richman**
Centaur Ⓕ CRC3033 (69' • DDD)



Handel's only ballet prologue *Terpsicore* was added to a revival of *Il pastor fido* in November 1734. It presents Apollo (the castrato Carestini) and some of the Muses

GRAMOPHONE Archive

## Janáček's Sinfonietta

Three recordings that came before Edward Gardner's, and how Gramophone rated them



**SEPTEMBER 1971**
**Janáček** Sinfonietta
**Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Rafael Kubelík**
DGG ● 2530 075 (£2·35)

Kubelík gets off to a clear win in the opening Prelude by playing it at the speed – a fast one – the composer suggests. This makes an altogether different impression, a far more exciting one, from the other performances. I am greatly taken by Kubelík's way of playing the music at the composer's speed, going all out for the brilliance of brass and percussion rather than for grandeur, the more so as the timpani are splendidly recorded. *Trevor Harvey*



**JULY 1981**
**Janáček** Sinfonietta
**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Charles Mackerras**
Decca Ⓕ ● SXDL7519

In the Sinfonietta, one might generalise by suggesting that Kubelík emphasises the Dvořákian background, while Mackerras looks forward to Stravinsky. Kubelík has a marvellous warm surge in the memorable opening figures of the Sinfonietta; Mackerras punches the rhythm out, with pounding drums and brass charging irresistibly forward. It is a thrilling performance. Affections for the qualities of Kubelík's performances need not be dislodged; but for newcomers to this splendid work, the new Mackerras would be hard to resist. *John Warrack*



**MARCH 1992**
**Janáček** Sinfonietta
**Bratislava Radio Symphony Orchestra / Ondrej Lénard**
Naxos Ⓢ 8 550411 (66' • DDD)

The chilly, empty-sounding ambience of Slovak Radio's concert hall does nothing for its big-hearted orchestra. If only Naxos could have warmed it up a little. That said, these are the orchestral sounds that Janáček ordered. The start is promising – a suitably pagan racket, with Janáček's trumpets duly ricocheting off each other. But rhythms are nowhere near as tight nor as impulsive as they need to be in the inner movements and the tension comes and goes in the preparative opening paragraph of the finale – one of the most exacting (and exciting) in all Janáček. No challenge to the Mackerras. *Edward Seckerson*

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appearing at a dedication of a new temple to Erato (Muse of Music; the soprano Strada). Terpsichore (Muse of Dance; the ballerina Marie Sallé) arrives fashionably late and is invited to mime different emotional states such as pleasure (a sarabande), mirthful requited love (a gigue) and the force of jealousy (a tirade-laden air). The entire prologue has been recorded complete just once before, by Nicholas McGegan (Hungaroton – nla).

James Richman directs with a sure sense of texture and graceful pacing in Concert Royal's courtly performance. Apollo's brilliant 'Gran tonante' is sung rightly as a fervent invocation by Kirsten Sollek, and Ava Pine's lyrical singing in Erato's lilting 'Di Parnasso i dolci accenti' is matched sweetly by recorders (Handel took both of these arias from his recent serenata *Parnasso in festa* and abridged them but Richman gives us the uncut original versions). The duet 'Tuoi passi son dardi' uses theorbo, *pizzicato* strings, recorders and organ to describe how pleasant it is to be wounded by Cupid's darts; this is first-rate (and highly unusual) Handel that one simply never hears. Concert Royal's plangent oboes and bassoons are shown to fine effect in the gorgeous Chaconne recycled from *Radamisto*. The album is filled out with ballets from *Ariodante* (which also featured Sallé, Carestini and Strada) and does not credit that recent scholarship has proved the Act 2 ballet depicting agreeable and disagreeable dreams belongs instead to *Alcina*. **David Vickers**

## Janáček

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'
Sinfonietta. Capriccio[a]. The Cunning Little Vixen – Suite (arr Talich/Mackerras)
[a]**Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *pf*
**Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner**
Chandos Ⓕ CHSA5142 (64' • DDD/DSD)




As our leading Janáček scholar, John Tyrrell, points out in his valuable notes to this issue, a clue to the character of the Sinfonietta 'is given by its original title: *Military Sinfonietta*'; and this colours the scoring of the first movement in particular, with its array of nine high trumpets plus bass trumpets, tenor tubas and timpani. There is a distinctly fanfaring note to the invention but Gardner seems concerned to domesticate this, as it were, to the concert hall, with proud phrasing and shining tone to the textures but some softening of the attack. The contrast with the more lyrical *Moderato* movement, finely played though it be, is to some extent forfeited. But the players are brilliant and the sound is glorious, very skilfully recorded.

Such skills are much needed in the Capriccio, with its eccentric scoring for flute, trumpets, tenor tuba (cheerful with his jaunty tune in the third movement) and three trombones all backing up the piano, left hand only. The original pianist, Otakar Hollmann, had, like the better-known Paul Wittgenstein, lost his right arm in the war. Jean-Efflam Bavouzet performs dazzling feats of virtuosity with a truly exacting solo part; and the extraordinary, fascinating textures are displayed by both artists and recording engineers. The third piece here, in what is the first of a Chandos series of Janáček's orchestral works, is the suite from *The Cunning Little Vixen*, originally made by Václav Talich, revised by his student Charles Mackerras, and played here with affection for the most lyrical elements in an enchanting opera. **John Warrack**

## Mahler

Symphony No 5
**WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Jukka-Pekka Saraste**
Profil Ⓕ PH14045 (70' • DDD)




First impressions are of an imposing acoustic (Cologne Philharmonie) and – on the back of an unflinching down-the-line trumpet solo – a somewhat generic view of the opening funeral march. But, following the stormy diversion at the heart of this first movement, Saraste and Mahler seem to find each other; and with that newfound kinship, the identity and sound of the performance – with reedier winds and a more doleful manner – seem suddenly to come to life.

Instinctive Mahlerians take their time, they breathe in the atmosphere and feel the subtext. In the midst of the second movement's impassioned onslaught, all surging strings and strident woodwinds, there is a passage for solo cellos – the eye of the storm, if you like – and Saraste finds within it something so personal and so inward-looking that it is as if he is placing his all his Mahlerian credentials on the line in that one passage. But there is better to come. The sprawling third-movement *Scherzo* is one of Mahler's most individual creations and, mindful of the composer's well-documented concerns that conductors would always take it too fast, Saraste positively basks in its atmosphere,

respecting Mahler's contemplative pauses, opening up great vistas with those gloriously ripe horn solos (beautifully taken by the Principal Horn) and even giving Bernstein's famous Vienna Philharmonic performance a run for his money in that gauche *pizzicato* passage, where Mahler's very particular stage direction that the oboe enter shyly and awkwardly could hardly be more sharply characterised.

Then the *Adagietto*, tender and flexible and through-phrased, taking as long as it takes and neither self-indulgently protracted nor pointedly 'on the clock', in accordance with Mahler's wishes that it be swifter and more songful. Saraste's reading dances through the finale, which feels, as it should, thoroughly liberating. The playing of the WDR SO, always top-class, has acquired an irresistible sweep along the way and the glorious release of the coda (given an expansive embrace by Saraste) is as good as it gets.

Of course, we are way past the point of asking if we really need another Mahler Fifth – there will be many others to come – but Saraste has insight and individuality; and if not in the Bernstein/VPO league, he surely has the measure of the piece. Mahler collectors would be well advised to give him a spin. **Edward Seckerson**

## Mozart · Nielsen

**Mozart** Clarinet Concerto, K622.
Der Liebe himmlisches Gefühl, K119 (arr Bliss).
No, che non sei capace, K419 (arr Bliss)
**Nielsen** Clarinet Concerto
**Julian Bliss** *cl*
**Royal Northern Sinfonia / Mario Venzago**
Signum Ⓕ SIGCD390 (64' • DDD)




Judge the tenor of Nielsen's Concerto with the first cadenza (4'37") in the opening movement played by Ib Erikson (1954) – edgy, oratorical, *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* extreme, his realisation of *passionato* uninhibitedly harsh; and turning this unbarred episode into an improvisation of earthy vehemence. Picture the composer's rural roots and the choleric obstinacy of the concerto's dedicatee Aage Oxenvad. Modern clarinettists such as Stanley Drucker and Martin Fröst don't hit the nails. Nor does Julian Bliss, partly because Mario Venzago's tempo is too quick for *Allegretto un poco*, five points higher than the marking crotchet=72. Leonard Bernstein (Drucker) and Osmo Vänska (Fröst) also misjudge the speed. Weighty rhythm isn't stressed, as it is by Mogens Wöldike (Erikson). And Bliss, though technically consummate, is emotionally narrow. Both musicians, however, range wider in the remaining movements, culminating in a finale of greater power.

Nielsen wrote for the A clarinet; so did Mozart, but for Anton Stadler's extended instrument, today a basset clarinet as used by Bliss. He follows Franz Giegling's conjectural restoration of the solo part with added personal touches but with no personal insights until the reprise of the second movement. A withdrawn tonal haze here bodes well for a reflective finale, where Venzago helps through a better awareness of orchestral detail and texture which continues into the two arias. Bliss, who adapted both soprano parts for standard clarinet, also orchestrated the existing piano reduction of K119. Consider these as encores where both musicians are at their finest. **Nalen Anthoni**

*Nielsen – selected comparisons:*
*Erikson, Danish St RSO, Wöldike (12/54R) (ELOQ) ELQ480 1858*
*Drucker, NYPO, Bernstein (4/68R) (SONY) SBK63041*
*Fröst, Lahti SO, Vänska (5/07) (BIS) BIS-SACD1463*
*Mozart – selected comparison:*
*W Meyer, Concentus Musicus Wien, Harnoncourt (3/01R) (WARN) 2564 69855-6*

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**17 Dec /18 Dec** **B. Martinů – What Men Live By** (Czech premiere), Czech Philharmonic, Rudolfinum, Prague

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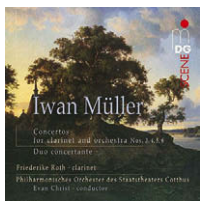


## I Müller

Clarinet Concertos – No 3; No 4; No 5; No 6. Duo concertante[a]

**Friederike Roth,** [a]**Johannes Gmeinder** *cls*
**Cottbus State Theatre Philharmonic Orchestra / Evan Christ**

Dabringhaus und Grimm Ⓕ MDG901 1846-6 (66' • DDD/DSD)




Iwan Müller was born in Tallinn, Estonia, 30 years after Mozart. In his youth he was a clarinet virtuoso in the court orchestra of the Russian tsars in St Petersburg. Nevertheless, he was important for developing the *clarinette omnitonique* in 1809 using a new key mechanism and an increase in the number of keys to 13, which could produce all the notes of the chromatic scale over four and a half octaves. However, the Paris Conservatoire rejected his invention in favour of the Böhm clarinet.

His four concertos included here are sub-Mozartian but melodically quite attractive. Each opens with a commanding flourish from the orchestra before the soloist introduces the main lyrical theme. The Third Concerto (the first to be published) then offers a chirping secondary idea and the exposition brings an extensive cadenza and four variations, with more bravura cadenzas intervening. The Fourth Concerto is more restrained in its mood and scoring, its floridly operatic main theme followed by another wistful tune and four variations on a Russian folksong. The Fifth Concerto has only a single movement. It opens brusquely in a march rhythm, then sets off as a gay concert rondo, with each section changing style and ending with a *tutti* and a baby cadenza.

The Sixth Concerto is the finest of the group. After the traditional first movement with two contrasting themes, a *Più lento* is thematically linked to the preceding *Allegro* and the closing *Bolero alla polacca*. But finest of all is the *Duo concertante*, which reminds one of Weber, another single movement which moves from *Adagio, quasi andante* to *Allegro molto*, like a cantabile and cabaletta, with the two clarinets first singing a barcarolle and then wittily chattering together in thirds and sixths.

Friederike Roth is a most sympathetic exponent of this repertoire. She has a gentle dexterity and a sweet, firm timbre, and phrases with delicacy. She is expertly accompanied by Evan Christ, and the recording balance could hardly be bettered.

**Ivan March**

## Nielsen

Symphonies – No 1, Op 7; No 4, 'Inextinguishable', Op 29

**New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Alan Gilbert**

Dacapo Ⓕ 6 220624 (69' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, New York, March 12-15, 2014




I find myself rather more favourably disposed to this second instalment of Alan Gilbert's Nielsen cycle than I was to the first (12/12). That's partly because I think he has a surer grasp of the First and Fourth Symphonies than of the Second and Third, but also partly because I think I'm acclimatising to his approach.

If I have it right, Gilbert is on something of a crusade. He seems enthralled by Nielsen's invigorating energy and equally so by his lyrical charm. And while the previous recordings erred on the affectionate side, here he is absolutely determined not to interrupt the all-important flow. So the transitions in the *Inextinguishable*, both within the first movement and between it and the next, are unusually intense, and the later stages of the finale are more jet-propelled than I think I've ever heard. The *Poco allegretto* may not be all that rustic but it is nothing if not refined, and the following *Poco adagio* is superbly eloquent. Where I was previously concerned about over-prominent timpani, in this melting-pot third movement they are stunning, and they are even more so in the famous finale duels.

In these (patched) live performances a few conductorly expostulations and even foot-stamps are captured. But how can any of the above not be fundamentally a good thing? Well, it has to be said that those transitions don't feel entirely natural, which may be partly because projection of such intimate phases to a large hall is compounded by close miking. Worse than that, and close to a fatal flaw, is the fact that, far from observing the notated *accelerando* into the finale coda (which really would have been amazing), Gilbert slams on the brakes and takes the easy diversion into grandiloquence.

No such objections arise with the First Symphony, which is engagingly direct from the weighty yet lithe opening to the blazing conclusion and which is also sensitive to the moments of wonder along the way. Not quite a version to displace the classic San Francisco/Blomstedt on Decca, perhaps, but certainly one I'd be happy to return to.

**David Fanning**

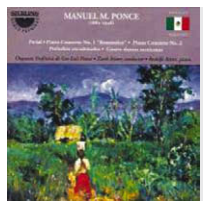
*Selected comparison:*
*San Francisco SO, Blomstedt (10/88R, 2/90R) (DECC) 478 6469DC6*

## Ponce

Piano Concertos[a] – No 1, 'Concierto romántico'; No 2. Preludios encadenados. Ferial. Cuatro Danzas mexicanas

[a]**Rodolfo Ritter** *pf* **San Luis Potosí Symphony Orchestra / Zaeth Ritter**

Sterling Ⓕ CDS1102-2 (76' • DDD)




Having a sweet tooth and a fondness for heady bravura concertos, I've had a soft spot for Manuel Ponce's Piano Concerto (premiered in 1912) ever since it appeared on the much-lamented ASV label in 1995 (Jorge Federico Osorio conducted in fine style by Enrique Bátiz – 1/96, 8/96). It features in this concert devoted to Ponce's music recorded in December 2012 at the Teatro de la Paz in San Luis Potosí (capital of the eponymous Mexican state). Its lush romantic themes and Lisztian fireworks bordering on pastiche are given a confident, no-holds-barred performance by siblings Zaeth and Rodolfo Ritter.

After this comes the world premiere recording of Ponce's Second Piano Concerto, left unfinished at this death in 1948. More than 50 per cent of the booklet's seven pages of discursive music notes are devoted to it, a proportion not, sadly, justified by the musical interest of the work's two extant brief movements.

This and the other works here are, of course, in a more advanced harmonic tonal language than the *Concierto romántico*. *Ferial*, Ponce's 1940 tone-poem depicting 'an afternoon in a fair of a little town near Teotihuacan' (the composer), is an exuberant, quintessential South American piece of the kind that earned Ponce the title of 'father of Mexican music'. I could have wished for the recorded sound to have been crisper and less generalised. The remainder of the disc features piano solos from Rodolfo Ritter: *Preludios encadenados* – four 'chained' or 'linked' contrasting preludes from 1927; and *Cuatro Danzas mexicanas* (1941), another quartet but of separate miniatures, none longer than two minutes, any one of which would make an attractive encore.

Apropos the booklet with its colourful front cover, a painting by Julian Ritter, what makes an editor of a booklet hand over the translation to someone whose knowledge of English is sketchier than a Google translate button? The essay by

Rodolfo Ritter could and should have been authoritative. As it is, its mirth-making solecisms let down the label and the customer. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Poulenc · Saint-Saëns

**Poulenc** Organ Concerto
**Saint-Saëns** Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78
**James O'Donnell** *org* **London Philharmonic Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin**
LPO Ⓜ LPO0081 (58' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, March 26, 2014




There are those of us who are in seventh heaven when a new disc of Saint-Saëns's *Organ* Symphony drops through the door. This version comes closely after a superb one by the Seattle Symphony under Ludovic Morlot, coupled with some purely orchestral Ravel (A/14). On this London Philharmonic disc, though, the organ is featured both in the Saint-Saëns and in Poulenc's 1938 Concerto, spotlighting the restored Royal Festival Hall instrument at a concert with the organist James O'Donnell given in March this year as part of the 'Pull Out All The Stops' festival.

Organ aficionados will welcome all the historical and technical details that the booklet contains. The real test of the effectiveness of a performance of the Saint-Saëns, however, is not just a question of the organ part but of how well the whole symphony coheres structurally and how lucidly Saint-Saëns's orchestration and textures are articulated. Yannick Nézet-Séguin scores well on most of those fronts, though he takes the second, *Poco adagio* section at well below the crotchet=60 marking, and detrimentally so. In the Poulenc Concerto, too, the third, *Andante moderato* section tends to drag. All in all, it is the faster music that seems to come off best, with a good rhythmic pulse in the Poulenc together with organ-playing of sensitivity and spark from O'Donnell, and with plenty of nervous energy, impetus and instrumental detail in the outer parts of the Saint-Saëns, ending with a gloriously shameless long pause on the final C major chord, followed by rapturous applause.
**Geoffrey Norris**

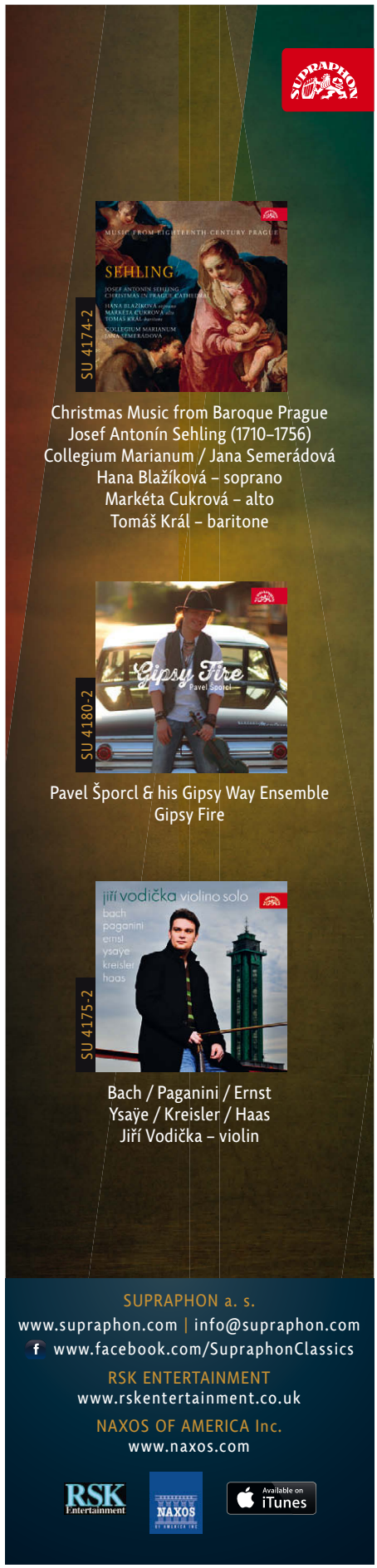
## Prokofiev

Romeo and Juliet, Op 64 – Suite
**Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Riccardo Muti**
CSO Resound Ⓕ CSOR9011402 (49' • DDD)
Recorded live at Symphony Centre, Chicago, October 2013




As I write, Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra are embarking on their fifth European tour. Their relationship has been a huge success, the maestro's fashionable outreach activity and old-style charisma neatly squaring a difficult circle. All that's missing is the kind of recorded legacy that Fritz Reiner and Sir Georg Solti could take for granted in what now seems a golden era. The CSO once promised to launch its own record label with Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and Prokofiev's Third Symphony. Neither materialised but *Romeo and Juliet* is a Muti staple too. The conductor has slightly cut his favoured selection of pieces from the first two suites, rejigging them into a sequence which follows Shakespeare's plot. No doubt the arrangement works in concert. On disc and online the competition is intense. Given that you can invest in more generous single-disc selections from the likes of Claudio Abbado's Berlin Philharmonic or plump for the complete ballet score under Rozhdestvensky, Previn, Maazel, Ozawa and Gergiev, is there a strong enough case for Muti's 49 minutes?

I'd say there is, not least because Muti's Chicagoans have some of the qualities once associated with Karajan's Berliners. Orchestral *tuttis* are not merely weighty but ultra-sophisticated and David Frost's sound team preserves their velvet sonority with a lustre rarely obtained, as here, from edited concert material. There's plenty of fine solo playing and not just from the famously demonstrative brass: former Principal Flute Mathieu Dufour (now in Berlin) is on particularly eloquent form. Less happily, the performance feels rather slow, preoccupied with Prokofiev's textural subtleties, whether delicate or deep-pile, at the expense of the narrative arc. Thus the 'Death of Tybalt' is never quite propulsive or violent enough. Once the strings have whirled him to destruction, a certain nonchalance sets in with the 15 hammered chords and a none-too-solemn funeral procession. As for the unprecedentedly ripe and rich climax of 'Romeo and Juliet before parting', Muti appears to have forgotten that this is an adolescent romance. Still, what follows is suitably ominous, the music winding down with a beautifully articulated, spooky deliberation. In 'Romeo at Juliet's tomb' we have again the kind of execution which proclaims the CSO as the world's best or something like it.

Recommended, even if Muti is occasionally heavy-handed. The concluding applause, which must surely have been vociferous, has been removed and a nicely illustrated booklet gives the lowdown on Prokofiev's visits to Chicago and his conviction that in *Romeo and Juliet*'s frank melodicism he had found the true music of the future.

**David Gutman**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Philadelphia Orch, Muti (5/82[R]) (EMI) 097982-2*

*BPO, Abbado (3/98) (DG) 453 439-2GH*

## Prokofiev

Symphonies – No 1, 'Classical', Op 25; No 2, Op 40. Dreams, Op 6

**São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop**

Naxos Ⓑ 8 573353 (57' • DDD)




As Marin Alsop has remarked, Prokofiev consistently bucked prevailing trends, whether political, musical or inter-personal, so it is appropriate that her ongoing symphony cycle should reveal an idiosyncratic take on the composer's world. While she is often credited with a flair for rhythm and colour, it is the broad, unforced naturalness of these readings which stakes out a distinctive territory. Also unusual is the decision to incorporate a slew of shorter rarities.

Sadly, it's not all plain sailing in this third instalment. Alsop's temperate *Classical* Symphony has many delightful touches – the finale has just the right kind of fizz and sparkle – but, with wind tuning less than spot-on, the work's opening flourish should have been remade. Nor, later, did I care for the extra kink in the phrasing of the Gavotte. At least Alsop never galumphs as Valery Gergiev is wont to do in his complete cycle.

Closer to Scriabin and Myaskovsky than much of Prokofiev's subsequent output, an atmospheric miniature dating from 1910 is placed between the symphonies. The performance of *Dreams* is persuasive enough even if Vladimir Ashkenazy's 1985 recording is tauter, his Cleveland Orchestra predictably unimpeachable.

In the Second Symphony Alsop's relatively cautious manner may win new converts to what Prokofiev described as music of 'iron and steel'. Wherever possible its substance is brought closer than usual to the more lyrical vein he explored in much of his later music, its deviations carefully dovetailed into the whole. Stick with the likes of Gergiev if you expect to hear the first movement as the ultimate 'earquake' experience and prefer the second maximally projected. Its main theme acquires a throbbing romantic fervour once the LSO strings get hold of it. Alsop's São Paulo section remains chaste and pensive even when the idea returns to (almost) round off the work.

A word on the quality of the competing sound recordings. Gergiev's complete survey was captured live, close miking emphasising edginess, angularity and the mock-Soviet heft of his British band. Naxos's sonic perspective is more relaxed, complementing the São Paulo Symphony's generally lighter sonority – many of its excellent émigré violinists are Russian trained. A detailed booklet-note from *Gramophone*'s Richard Whitehouse replaces the more basic material accompanying earlier volumes. **David Gutman**

*Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:*

*LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4*

*Dreams – selected comparison:*

*Cleveland Orch, Ashkenazy (3/87[R]) (DECC) 473 2772DF2*

## Schubert

Symphonies – No 1, D82; No 2, D125. Adrast, D137 – Funeral March. Die Zauberharfe, D644 – Rosamunde Overture

**Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard**

BIS Ⓕ SACD BIS1989 (77' • DDD/DSD)




The definition and dynamism that Thomas Dausgaard and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra have been bringing to their cycle of Schubert symphonies are qualities that are radiantly replicated in these performances of the First and Second. The music exhibits all the exuberance and confidence of youth – Schubert was only 16 when he wrote the First Symphony, 18 when he finished the Second – combined with respectful acknowledgements to the dominating symphonic force of the day, Beethoven.

The fact that Schubert knew the *Eroica* Symphony and had the melody of its finale in the back or forefront of his mind is scarcely open to question when you hear the theme he introduces as the second subject of the First Symphony's opening movement: the similarities between the two can be no mere accident but in Schubert's hands the melody and its accompaniment acquire a disarming jauntiness, replacing any weighty Beethovenian implications with a healthy *jeu d'esprit*. Dausgaard and his orchestra fully attune themselves to this teenage Schubertian world: the emotional abysses that were to daunt Schubert later on are as yet unenvisaged, with even the *Andante* movement reflecting serenity rather than angst. The Second Symphony is a similar delight, especially in this performance which buoys up the rhythms, artlessly etches in the scintillating instrumental detail, finds a singing mellifluousness for the lyricism and reveals the music in all its sparkling invention and innocence. The operatic fragments complement the symphonies ideally, making this a first-rate companion to the Swedish CO's discs of Symphonies Nos 3-9.

**Geoffrey Norris**

## Schumann

Cello Concerto, Op 129[a]. Adagio and Allegro, Op 70[b]. Drei Romanzen, Op 94[b]. Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102[b]. Drei Phantasiestücke, Op 73[b]. Liederkreis, Op 39[b] – No 5, Mondnacht; No 12, Frühlingsnacht

**Raphael Wallfisch** *vc* [b]**John York** *pf*

[a]**South West German Chamber Orchestra, Pforzheim / Niklas Willén**

Nimbus Ⓕ NI5916 (75' • DDD)

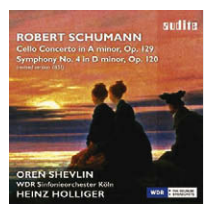
## Schumann

Symphony No 4, Op 120. Cello Concerto, Op 129[a]

[a]**Oren Shevlin** *vc* **WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Heinz Holliger**

Audite Ⓕ SACD AUDITE97 679 (53' • DDD/DSD)




The Mantovani-style fanned chords at the start of Arthur H Lilienthal's all-strings rewrite of the Cello Concerto does not augur well, though Raphael Wallfisch rises from his freshly retextured orchestral bed determined not to allow the missing wind lines with their absent acerbities to compromise the strength of Schumann's message. He offers a convincing performance, phrasing with warmth and agility, while at the transition into the slow movement (at the start of tr 2) he achieves an affecting level of poignancy. But compare the close of the movement with Oren Shevlin's recording of Schumann's original with the Cologne WDR Symphony under Heinz Holliger, where the sting of brass and rocketing winds intensify the drama, and you soon realise what's missing in Lilienthal's rewrite, even though the arrangement was prompted by Schumann's own unrealised plan to prepare a version for string quintet. Had he done so I rather suspect it would have involved a

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certain amount of re-composition, not the blanket softening that we have here. And good as Wallfisch is, Shevlin suggests more of the fragile resolve that underlies the piece, fighting the dying light in a way that only Schumann could. Shevlin's tone is more subtly variegated than Wallfisch's, while his attack in the finale is toughened and springy. Holliger too keeps things stripped to the bone, sweetening the line where necessary, though never to excess, and with a level of clarity that others aim for but achieve only at a price of compromised expressivity. As to rivals, among older recordings I would especially recommend János Starker's Cologne version under Rafael Kubelík, recently issued by Orfeo as part of a three-disc Kubelík collection (all first-release material), probably the best we've had from Starker, simultaneously tender-hearted and tough-grained.

Most of Wallfisch's Schumann extras with piano are nicely done, the *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* delivered in the main with a light touch both by Wallfisch and by his fine pianist John York, the *Three Romances*, Op 94, and the Op 73 *Fantasy Pieces* similarly eloquent in a relaxed, unassuming way (barring the fiery last movement of Op 73), the Adagio and Allegro, Op 70, in many respects the disc's highlight. I wasn't too keen on the two Lieder transcriptions (both taken from the Op 39 *Liederkreis* collection), certainly not the start of 'Mondnacht', where the cello's presence spoils the music's solitary atmosphere, and in 'Frühlingsnacht', where the soloist ideally needs to project with greater presence.

Holliger's account of the 1851 Fourth Symphony has all the qualities that make his accompaniment to the Cello Concerto so distinctive, namely flow, transparency, and character (note the subtle but dramatic *diminuendo* among the horns at 4'42"). The expressive *Romanze* follows close on the heels of the first movement, surely as it should, the *Scherzo* asserts a virile presence, while the fast-paced finale is breezy and exhilarating, with plenty of light and shade. Altogether a worthy continuation of Holliger's Schumann series, with excellent playing and well-balanced sound.

**Rob Cowan**

*Cello Concerto – selected comparison:*
*Starker, Cologne RSO, Kubelík (ORFE) C726 143D*

## R Strauss

'Tone Poems, Vol 3'
Also sprach Zarathustra, Op 30.
Aus Italien, Op 16
**SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and Freiburg / François-Xavier Roth**
Hänssler Classic Ⓕ CD93 320 (78' • DDD)




Both pieces open on an auspicious pedal note but any notion that they were cut from the same cloth ends there. *Aus Italien* is more Romantic symphony than would-be tone-poem and the air of the accidental tourist weighs heavily on it. But much as François-Xavier Roth ladles on vitality and belief, shaping and phrasing with wholehearted spontaneity, even he cannot bring home the 'Funiculì, Funiculà' driven finale where the incongruity of it all is just too much to swallow.

I've always thought that the main problem with the piece (and there are many) was that nothing could possibly live up to the corker of a tune that Strauss offers up and then regretfully leaves behind partway through the country sojourn of his opening movement. So gorgeous is it that it lingers like wishful thinking in the subconscious as idea upon idea fails to live up to its promise. I've already referred to Roth's belief (or the illusion of belief) and how that in turn communicates to his players – the excellent SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg – and the pleasure here lies in the elegance and energy of the performance, and how that in part compensates for the shortcomings and longueurs of the piece.

But that energy is channelled to far greater purpose in a quite splendid account of what by comparison is an unqualified masterpiece – *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The Konzerthaus Freiburg opens to its suitably orgiastic sunrise, the satisfying thwack of those timpani solos driving home the mother of all proclamations. The real brilliance of this piece lies in the way in which Strauss exhausts that ubiquitous three-note motif without it ever becoming a mannerism or indeed an irritation. It feels totally, philosophically, organic. Roth for his part balances the 'man and superman' elements, savouring the richly harmonised intimacies but going large with the cosmic 'joys and passions', an effusion of violins and tumbling horns. The great fugue does not sound too 'scientific' and the climactic restatement of the opening fanfare is as surely nailed as the 'Dance Song' – or cosmic beer garden, as I like to think of it – is euphoric. I'd still like more of the Midnight Bell but wasn't it ever thus.

This must be one of the most satisfying *Zarathustras* around – and even if you are allergic (as I am) to *Aus Italien* there is always that first-movement tune to revisit from time to time. **Edward Seckerson**

## R Strauss

Don Juan, Op 20[a]. Ein Heldenleben, Op 40[b]
**London Philharmonic Orchestra / Bernard Haitink**
LPO Ⓜ LPO0079 (65' • [a]ADD/[b]AAD)
Recorded live at the [b]Royal Albert Hall, London, August 29, 1986; [a]Royal Festival Hall, London, December 3, 1992




It goes without saying that this new LPO live disc enters a crowded field. What, then, justifies its release? For a start, both performances show Haitink on fiery, unbuttoned form – the caution of the conductor's 2008 CSO Resound *Heldenleben* (10/10) is nowhere to be heard. The *Don Juan*, meanwhile, gives any account in the catalogue a run for its money in terms of sheer élan, and bristles with energy. The LPO's playing is vibrant and full of the sense of a live performance, and the engineering – taped at the Royal Festival Hall in 1992 – is pretty decent.

The change in sound quality between this and the later work is significant and the booklet reveals why: the *Heldenleben* dates from six years earlier and was recorded at the BBC Proms. It's all a bit rougher and readier, with the horns, in particular, tending to dominate the texture and the percussion coming across as boomy and clattery. However, it's a performance that still allows for some subtlety, with nicely characterised violin solos from David Nolan (although he's no match, in terms of refined virtuosity, for the CSO's Robert Chen) and careful handling of the critics, whose reappearance before the battle is especially chilling. The battle itself comes across as a titanic struggle, with Haitink driving the martial rhythms hard; indeed, throughout the whole piece there is a bracing sense of the heroic, of cadences fought for and bravely achieved. Despite this, though, the conductor's command of the work's vast structure never seems in doubt. **Hugo Shirley**

## R Strauss · Varèse

**R Strauss** Ein Heldenleben, Op 40
**Varèse** Amériques
**Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Ingo Metzmacher**
Challenge Classics Ⓕ CC72644 (71' • DDD)

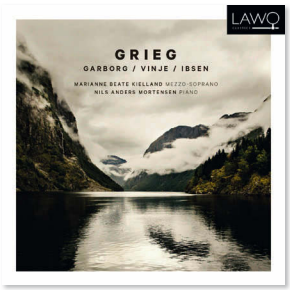



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Metzmacher's performance, the overall excellence of the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester's playing and the sympathetic violin characterisation of Wei Lu – a warm, complex and sometimes vulnerable 'companion' as opposed to the needy nag we so often hear. The sound quality is fabulous, too, with a wide dynamic range that etches a fearsome 'Hero at Battle', the percussion virtually in your lap. Controversial? Not in performance terms. But editorially, please note that this is the 'original' version of the score. Not an issue until 'The Hero's Retirement', where instead of the achingly beautiful harmonies that lead towards that clinching recall of *Zarathustra* – for me the work's expressive high point – there's major-key calm and a quiet ending. No hint of *Also sprach* in sight (or hearing). It'll take some getting used to, if you ever do get used to it (no reason why you should, given the impact of Strauss's final version) but I would strongly recommend you hear the performance simply because, as an interpretation, it works so well. In a sense Metzmacher's directness suits Strauss's original, unequivocal 'happy ending'.

Varèse's futuristic *Amériques* is similarly presented in its first version, a more radical option than what we know this time, with a bigger band, extra (mostly exotic) percussion, added offstage brass, extensive remodelling and restructuring. There's still that bulldozing, Jurassic-style finale, heard here in all its cinematic splendour in a recording that should carry a health warning – or free ear plugs. It makes the close of Stravinsky's *Rite* sound like JC Bach by comparison, while the *Scherzo* from Mahler's Seventh Symphony makes a momentary and unexpected showing at around 8'46". You could spend many hours shifting between the first and second versions (though don't tell the neighbours it was my idea) but unlike with *Ein Heldenleben* I wouldn't care to predict which you'd end up preferring. Possibly this one. A fascinating and exciting CD.

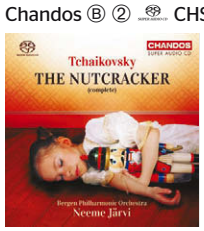
**Rob Cowan**

## Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker, Op 71

**Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Neeme Järvi**

Chandos Ⓑ ② CHSA5144 (85' • DDD/DSD)




In this final instalment of their trilogy of Tchaikovsky ballet recordings, it comes as no surprise that the players in the Bergen Philharmonic are at one with their conductor. They play this score with a panache and imagination that holds the listener enthralled by the tale that begins one Christmas Eve as Clara Silberhaus journeys from snow-covered forest to the enchanted kingdom of Confiturembourg.

Neeme Järvi and his Bergen Philharmonic scamper through the Overture and opening scene so quickly that I wondered if they'd set up a new speed record for the entire ballet. They come in at 84 minutes, second only to Gergiev with the Kirov Orchestra at 81 (Philips, 1/99). It is unlikely such tempi would be heard in the theatre but this latest recording never sounds rushed; indeed, Järvi's tempi for the dances from the familiar *Nutcracker* Suite would be in tune with the expectations of most balletomanes.

Character and mood are vividly conveyed. Clara's godfather's comic tune, on violas with a sinister twist, catches his cranky gait, and the nocturnal scene by moonlight is unnerving. Could Tchaikovsky's ghostly vision with harp, piccolos, flute and tremolo strings have influenced Britten when he composed his glittering variation for the harp in *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*? It's rather a shame that the clock chimes in this scene sound incontrovertibly suburban! Järvi presses onward when the four horns return with the reprise in the Waltz of the Flowers and delivers a *coup de théâtre* in the final courtly waltz, making a brief but substantial *rit* 2'30" in. The climax to the Pas de deux is eloquently put across, with the conductor maintaining the momentum until the end. Exemplary sound and documentation. **Adrian Edwards**

## Vivaldi

'Concerti per flauto'

Concertos – 'Il gardellino', RV90; 'La pastorella', RV95; RV103; RV375; 'La notte', Op 10 No 2 RV439; RV443; RV566

**Maurice Steger** *rec/flautino*

**I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis**

Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC90 2190 (69' • DDD)




In a world with no shortage of Vivaldi recorder concerto discs, avoiding the routine is a must. Some fail, some try too hard, but the staggeringly talented Maurice Steger finds an excellent balance here, first by his thoughtful selection of pieces and then by the specific interpretative care he gives to each of them.

Selection first: we get the well-known descriptive concertos *Il gardellino* (in its colourful 'chamber' version), *La notte* (in its 'orchestral' Op 10 version) and *La pastorella*; we get the famous 'sopranino' RV443, though transcribed down a fourth on to descant, as Vivaldi himself seems to have sanctioned; we get the recorder gamboling among friends in the 'molti stromenti' concerto RV566 and in the chamber concerto RV103; and we get Steger's own transcription of a violin concerto, RV375, apparently done for the simple reason that he wanted some different technical and musical challenges.

As for the performances, there is not much to be said about Steger's virtuosity other than that his dazzling fingerwork, varied articulation and colour seem to make him capable of anything he wants. What really makes this disc an outstanding one, however, is the way he creates an individual musical world for each concerto. Maybe that is to be expected in the descriptive ones, yet few others have matched his disturbingly spectral, lute-haunted *La notte*, and never have I heard a more pleasingly pastoral *La pastorella*, with its tasteful (yes, tasteful) additions of hurdy-gurdy, psaltery and, in the second movement, folk-style strings. RV443, which can sound toy-like and gimmicky at its higher pitch, here comes across with new depth and variety of detail, releasing some big *rubato* gestures in the first movement and setting the lutes glinting like lights on the water in the slow second. RV375 offers the recorder a dignified and 'grown-up' new solo setting. I Barrocchisti, an orchestra whose *joie de vivre* never sleeps, are the perfect partners. It's pure pleasure.

**Lindsay Kemp**

## 'Under the Stars'

**Brahms** Hungarian Dance No 4 **Bull** Sæterjentens Søndag **Debussy** Clair de lune **Dvořák** Songs my mother taught me, Op 55 B104 No 4 **Elgar** Salut d'amour, Op 12 **Fauré** Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1 **Hubay** Carmen Fantasy **Kreisler** La gitana **Shostakovich** The Gadfly – Romance **Siem** Canopy[a] **Spencer** Under the Stars **Tchaikovsky** Melody, Op 42 No 3. Sérénade mélancolique, Op 26

**Charlie Siem** *vn* **Munich Radio Orchestra / Paul Goodwin; [a]English Chamber Orchestra**

Sony Classical Ⓕ 88883 78764-2 (76' • DDD)




Charlie Siem's new CD takes its title from a song composed by Herbert Spencer (1877-1944), a name that had me scurrying to the web for clarification. As it happens he is not the arranger Herbert J Spencer,

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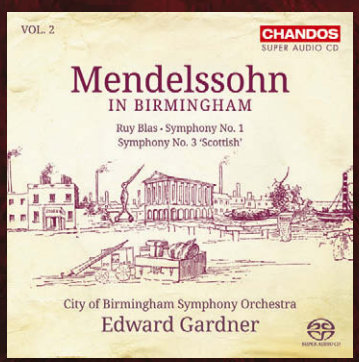

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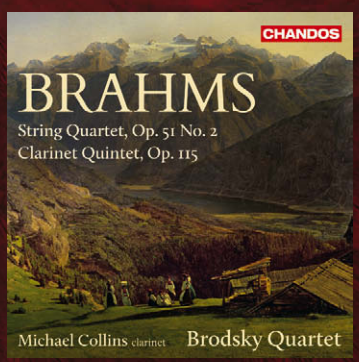

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Gramophone / BBC / Music-web international



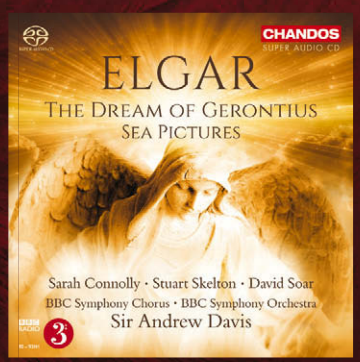

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The Sunday Times

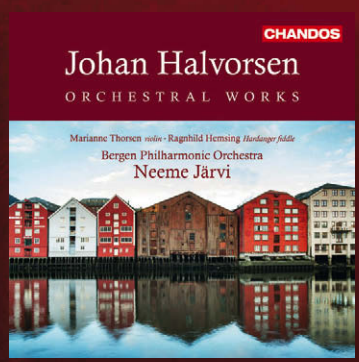



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IRR OUTSTANDING
International Record Review




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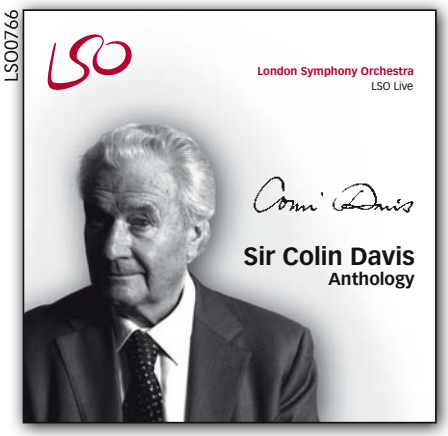

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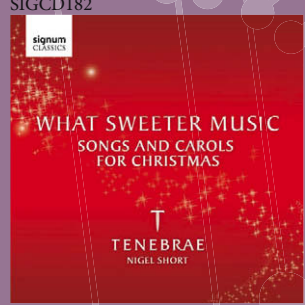

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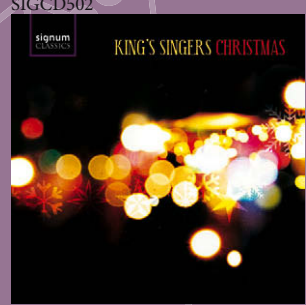

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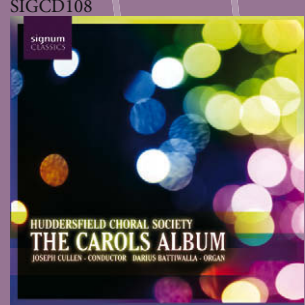

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Sensational playing: Terje Tønnesen directs his Camerata Nordica, who sound like 'a unconducted string quartet' on their new recording for BIS

a longtime associate of John Williams in Hollywood, but a songwriter who came to the attention of Fritz Kreisler; the violinist arranged this song as an encore, as he did a number of these tracks which were much favoured for this purpose.

Siem's programme flows effortlessly, concluding with his own likeable composition, *Canopy*, in which he also takes on the role of conductor. En route we have a couple of substantial items, with a *Carmen Fantasy* by Jenő Hubay and Tchaikovsky's *Sérénade mélancolique*. The Hubay work was new to me: it is an unadulterated delight and brings out the best in this soloist, who tosses off every violinistic trick in the book with aplomb. He also lovingly conveys the tender mood of Micaëla's aria in this extended arrangement of her tune. Siem is less successful in the Tchaikovsky Serenade: the climax of the piece sounds uncomfortable to the ear and he is not helped by the pedestrian accompaniment of the conductor Paul Goodwin. It maybe unfair on one so young to invoke in this context a violinist of an earlier generation but Grumiaux's recording with Edo de Waart (Eloquence, 11/71) transports you to another plane, where the music is alive with the soloist's innate sense of fantasy.

**Adrian Edwards**

## 'Visions fugitives'

**Bartók** Divertimento, Sz113 **Hindemith** Fünf Stücke, Op 44 No 4 **Prokofiev** Visions fugitives, Op 22 **Webern** Fünf Sätze, Op 5

**Camerata Nordica / Terje Tønnesen**

BIS Ⓕ BIS2126 (69' • DDD/DSD)



The playing of the Camerata Nordica on this disc of music from between the wars is, in a word, sensational. They bring less vibrato than Barshai's Moscow Chamber Orchestra to Prokofiev's fleeting visions, also a bit less bite, but every little number tells its own story. The parody waltz of No 11 is stiff and pawky, yet swifter and less mannered than Bashmet, leading directly (in Barshai's ordering) into No 10, *Ridicolosamente*, a touch slower, heavier and less ridiculous than Barshai's absurdist flight of fancy. The *glissandos* of No 13 conjure an apparition of something crawling, slithering; they always use such effects and techniques not as an end in themselves (though the disc is certainly a celebration of sheer virtuosity) but to bring characters and shadows to life, even in the superficially abstract quintets by Hindemith and Webern.

The former may be conceived for a school orchestra, the latter for an experimental string quartet, but Tønnesen reveals the yearning expression they hold in common across the bridge of tonality, by the side of which Marriner's Academy are neat and genteel. Camerata Nordica's collective imagination – and they do often sound like an unconducted string quartet – tends towards the extremes of tempo and colour which suit early Britten (12/13) less well than mature Bartók. Only Ferenc Fricsay takes the central nightmare of the Divertimento more slowly, yet how surely Tønnesen builds its successive waves of terror and the silences that separate them. The cimbalom-like double-stopping to launch the finale is just this side of hysterical, before the violin solo at 2'50" brings a memory of *The Lark Ascending* in rhapsodic invention, somehow then leaping forwards to seething Ligetian polyphony within a bare two minutes: Bartók in a nutshell. **Peter Quantrill**

*Prokofiev – selected comparison:*
*Moscow Sols, Bashmet (5/07) (ONYX) ONYX4017*
*Bartók, Prokofiev – selected comparison:*
*Moscow CO, Barshai (2/63[R]) (BRIL) 9101*
*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*
*ASMF, Marriner (DECC) 478 2759DB10*

PHOTOGRAPHY: IAN DINGLE

# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

# MUSIC OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

**Arnold Whittall** ponders the relative neglect of Dutch and Belgian composers compared with their French and German counterparts



Admirable advocacy: Peter Biloen conducts a concert recording of Joseph Callaerts's Symphonie concertante

Whenever previously unknown names appear on new recordings it's natural to wonder whether the filtering process of canon formation, especially in orchestral music, has been grossly unjust to those composers excluded. Have Adolphe Samuel, Joseph Callaerts and Elisabeth Kuyper been traduced by the prominence accorded to César Franck, Richard Strauss and Max Bruch? Arriving at an honest answer to this question is quite difficult, given that their music tends to sound like pale – and sometimes lurid – shadows of those established masters. Had the works of Franck, Strauss and Bruch vanished, of course, we might feel differently. So has the neglect of these and other composers born in Belgium and the Netherlands been justified?

With **Elisabeth Kuyper** (1873-1953), almost certainly. Her Violin Sonata (1902) and Concerto (1908) are dutiful but plain and foursquare replicas of then-contemporary formulas, showing little if any flair for injecting the familiar clichés of Germanic late-Romanticism with new life. **Adolphe Samuel**'s Sixth Symphony, written in 1891 when the composer was 67, has all the stolid pretensions of a respected teacher steeped in Liszt and Wagner; but works like this inspire renewed appreciation of Brahms's reluctance to embark on a symphony before he was convinced that he had something distinctive and arresting to say. **Joseph Callaerts**'s Organ Concerto, also apparently an 1890s work by a composer in his sixties, is even weaker, its stentorian ending coming across as empty bombast rather than ceremonial swagger.

In this company, **Joseph Jongen** (1873-1953) is a more substantial figure, with something of an international profile by way of his solo organ music. Even so, his weighty, well-nigh 40-minute *Symphonie concertante* for organ and orchestra (1926-27) tries the patience, lacking the rhythmic energy to back up its opulent harmonic fabric. The slow movement is by far the best, its long, steadily unfolding violin melody generating music of unusually sustained intensity; unfortunately, even this runs out of steam about four minutes before the end. *Three Symphonic Movements* (1951) starts with a post-Debussian Nocturne that has an engaging quality of expressive refinement – all credit to conductor Martyn Brabbins for refusing to let the music stagnate – though the two dance-like movements which follow have too little of the momentum needed to fulfil the promise of the Nocturne.

With **Jeppe Moulijn** (*b*1972) we enter a musical world where to be properly contemporary means something very different from what it did to Samuel and Callaerts in the 1890s. To characterise Moulijn as anti-avant-garde or postmodern seems rather more negative than the upbeat qualities of his music require. His booklet-notes admit links with Barber, Walton, Korngold and Britten – so far, so neo-Romantic – but there is also something of the current mainstream as represented by John Adams and Thomas Adès in his fastidious yet never effete designs. The two concertos that frame the programme give a good indication of how he can turn an essentially conservative idiom to positive ends, his ear unfailingly alert to the dangers of routine and of padding. Despite passages that hint at Szymanowski and Berg, the Violin Concerto (2006) is no nostalgic wallow, and other plus signs are imaginative orchestration and strong control of a gradually dissolving if not disintegrating structure. The live performance is excellent – not just the soloist Joris van Rijn but also the University of Amsterdam Orchestra. Moulijn's Viola Concerto (2010) has a less strong musical personality, with an idiom that is constantly on the verge of sliding into stylistic anonymity, but the performance is lively and eloquent. Of the two vocal works, I much preferred *Et fit lux* (2012) to the *Four Sea Poems* (2007), worthy but rather monotonous Whitman settings. *Et fit lux*, using a Latin translation of a Dutch poem, is more forceful, even heroic in character, and it works extremely well, helped by the bold dramatic tenor of Peter Gijsbertsen.

None of these discs can be faulted technically, though the live recording of the organ works in Antwerp Cathedral cannot hope to achieve the clarity and sharpness of balance that a studio environment might provide. Full marks too for Tom Janssens's excellent booklet-notes with the Brabbins disc. His title, 'Borderline Cases: Composing between Germany and France', pinpoints the geographical context, and brings me back to my initial thought – the marginalisation of most Belgian and Dutch composers consequent on German and French dominance. This might have seemed inevitable a century ago but borderlines are much less absolute today. G

## THE RECORDINGS



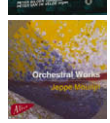
**Kuyper** Vn Conc. Vn Son
**Maslovaric, Rumiantsev; Brno PO / Toms**
Feminae Ⓕ CD1401



**Jongen** Three Sym Movts
**Samuel** Sym No 6
**Royal Flemish PO / Brabbins**
Royal Flemish PO Ⓕ RFP006



**Callaerts** Org Conc **Jongen** Symphonie concertante
**Van de Velde; RFPO / Biloen**
Royal Flemish PO Ⓕ RFP008



**Moulijn** Orch Wks
**Various artists**
Aliud Ⓕ ACDBE067-2

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Mozart's sublime tragic comedy is directed in a new production by Kasper Holten. Mariusz Kwiecien takes the title role, with Alex Esposito as the fresh, vigorous Leporello, and acclaimed French soprano Véronique Gens as Donna Elvira. Nicola Luisotti conducts.

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# Handel's Messiah

**Emmanuelle Haïm** joins Richard Lawrence to discuss the great seasonal oratorio
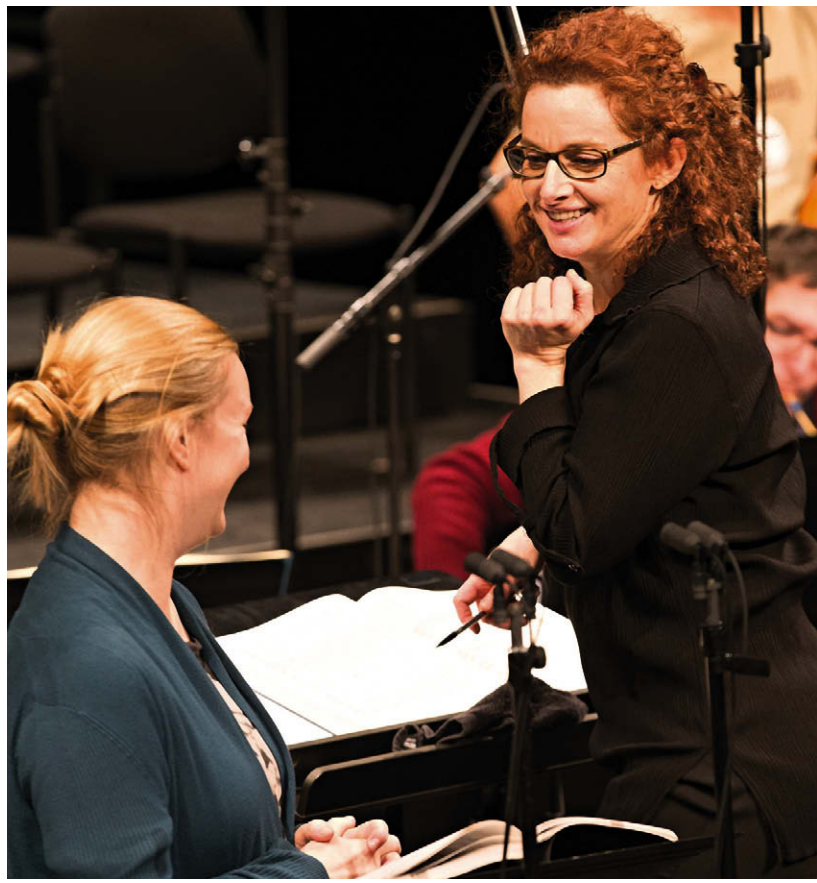
A cool, grey day at the end of October. The city is teeming with Everton Football Club supporters over for a match with the local team. The fans are well behaved at first; later there are scuffles with the police, and the main square is a sea of beer cans and broken glass. But I am in Lille for another reason: to talk to the conductor Emmanuelle Haïm about the new recording of *Messiah* with her group, Le Concert d'Astrée.

Haïm uses the Bärenreiter edition by John Tobin (1965). I begin by asking her if that was a difficult choice. 'Not difficult, no; but it was interesting to go through everything that Handel did and explore the possibilities. He was very pragmatic and made changes appropriate to different places and situations. It was very much my own choice to have a countertenor soloist, and a female soprano rather than a boy treble. And having a small chorus [of 20] made virtuosity possible: a nice fast, alive tempo in "For unto us", for example.'

When I note that the chorus is all-British, she responds: 'When I started conducting, I worked with European Voices and the Glyndebourne Chorus. I was seduced by the British tradition of choral singing. And in Britain everybody has sung *Messiah* since childhood, but in France we don't have that tradition. I sometimes mix the nationalities, but the French singers always complain about the difficulty of singing in English!'

This recording, taken from two concerts in the Lille opera house, was the first time Haïm had performed *Messiah* since 2009. Her interpretation is informed by a close study of the text and how it was compiled by Charles Jennens. 'The libretto is quite theatrical,' she says, 'and Handel makes it even more theatrical, so the sacred words have to convince in every possible way. I like to explore how the text is matched by the music, and how the drama is divided into scenes.'

How deeply Haïm has studied the dramatic element becomes apparent when we turn to the score. After a brisk 'And the glory of the Lord', taken one-in-a-bar ('I wanted it spontaneous, enthusiastic, full of vital energy'), comes scene 2 – 'the judgement that goes with the coming of the Lord'. I remark that I am still not used to a bass recitative being followed by an alto aria. Her response: 'But "Thus saith the Lord" is reassuring, while "But who may abide" is a warning. The refiner's fire is frightening but necessary, and the sudden *fortes* in the strings are like flashes of lightning. Then straight into "And he shall purify", as it's really linked.'



It's clear that Haïm (right) is full of admiration for her soprano soloist Lucy Crowe

Moving on to the shepherds abiding in the field, Haïm says that she tried to put herself 'into the context of the scene', with light coloration for the continuo and a sense of the angels approaching at the start of 'Glory to God' as well as receding at the end. 'Rejoice greatly' is done in the usual, common-time version, with some ornamentation, 'though it was difficult to find alternatives to the runs that were as good as the original!' In the next scene, she wanted a sense of surprise in 'Then shall the eyes of the blind' – a recitative that can go for nothing – and the utmost simplicity in 'He shall feed his flock'. Haïm is full of praise for the soprano



## The historical view

### *Charles Jennens*
*Letter to Edward Holdsworth, 1743*

'His Messiah has disappointed me, being set in great hast[e], tho' he said he would be a year about it, & make it the best of all his Compositions. I shall put no more Sacred Words into his hands, to be thus abus'd.'

### *George Bernard Shaw*
*Review in 'The World', 1891*

'Why...does not somebody set up a thoroughly rehearsed and exhaustively studied performance of the Messiah in St James's Hall with a chorus of twenty capable artists? Most of us would be glad to hear the work seriously performed once before we die.'

### *Sir Thomas Beecham*
*RCA recording (1959) booklet-notes*

'It is interesting that Handel...finds less inspiration in the New Testament than in the Old, where the vigour and pathos of Isaiah and the Psalms kindle his imagination more effectively than the calmer narrations of the Apostles.'

Lucy Crowe and the way she floats softly up to B flat at the end, 'like a rest in heaven'. The last chorus of Part 1, 'His yoke is easy', is taken at a steady tempo, to allow for clear articulation of the dotted figures and the trills.

Part 2, Haïm says, is dark and tragic, a different piece entirely. The scenes of flagellation and crucifixion seem to accuse the audience: this is Christ, suffering for your sake. Haïm sees 'He was despised' not as a detached narration but as a first-hand account by a man talking about his best friend. After the jagged rhythm of 'Surely he hath borne our griefs', the fugal 'And with his stripes' comes as healing balm. Haïm emphasises the universality of the straying sheep by her *marcato* phrasing of the opening words. 'For "He trusted in God",' she says, 'We tried to do sarcastic colours at "Let him deliver him": they are so certain, so sure of being right.'

Regarding the tenor recitatives and *arioso*, Haïm was keen – as with 'He was despised' – for them not to be a commentary but to sound like a personal experience. 'What's tricky is the brief recitative ["He was cut off"] when Christ dies; you then go super-fast to Holy Saturday and "But thou didst not leave". It's difficult to have a real break after the recitative, but we tried not to move on too quickly.' Haïm's attention to detail extends to the next recitative: 'I wanted it to sound like

## *'I wanted the "Hallelujah" chorus to be alive, but not like a panzer division'* – Emmanuelle Haïm

God speaking,' she says, and thus she emphasises each syllable of 'Thou art my son'. She draws attention to the light scoring of 'Thou art gone up on high', likening it to a trio sonata, before commenting that the semiquavers of 'The Lord gave the word' are spreading the word 'to Jupiter and all the planets', a point given verbal expression in 'Their sound is gone out'. As for the 'Hallelujah' chorus: 'I wanted it to be alive, but not like a panzer division.'

We have exceeded our allotted hour and the tape has run out, but Haïm has generously put back the time of her ensuing rehearsal.

Part 3 begins with 'I know that my redeemer liveth', another lightly scored number: Haïm mentions Crowe's expressive singing at 'And though worms destroy this body'. 'There's fear and mystery at "Since by man came death", and pity for mankind at "For as in Adam all die",' says Haïm, who smiles as she remembers bass soloist Christopher Purves's 'weird' cadence in the B section of 'The trumpet shall sound'. She wanted to make 'O death, where is thy sting', the only true duet in the oratorio, sound 'urgent'. And after the grandeur of the opening to 'Worthy is the Lamb', Haïm thinks of 'Blessing and honour' as a prayer, 'so I hold back before the entry of the trumpets and timpani'. Finally, she phrases the 'Amen' chorus as mankind's 'thank you', and she concurs when I say that one of the most telling moments in the entire work is the silent bar just before the end.

Haïm has been so fired up by flicking through the pages of the score that she exclaims, 'I want to do it again!' But instead she is conducting *Castor et Pollux* in a couple of hours' time. And the glories of Handel and Rameau sustain me the next day as I travel back to London with a horde of disappointed football fans (Lille 0, Everton 0). G

▶ To read Gramophone's review of Emmanuelle Haïm's Messiah, turn to page 87

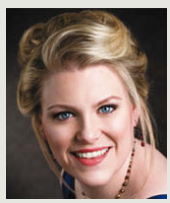
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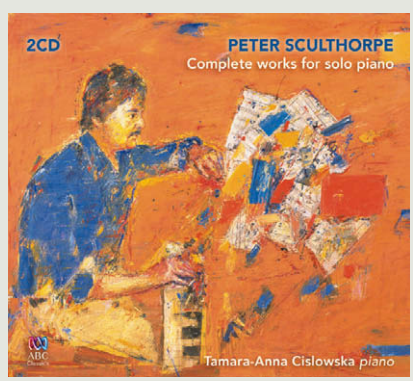

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# Chamber



Richard Whitehouse listens to Ustvolskaya chamber works:
*'Music such as this admits of no false compromise and finds doughty advocacy in Patricia Kopatchinskaja'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 70



Fabrice Fitch on recorder music spanning multiple centuries:
*'There is commitment, technical versatility, unanimity of ensemble and near-immaculate tuning on display'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 71

## Atterberg · Rangström

**Atterberg** String Quartets – Op 2/39; Op 11
**Rangström** String Quartet
**Stenhammar Quartet**
CPO Ⓕ CPO777 270-2 (62' • DDD)



The compositional history of Atterberg's quartets is not straightforward. The First, Op 2, was composed in 1907-08 but Atterberg was not satisfied with it, discarding the outer movements. The central *Scherzo* and *Romance* were retained and in 1937 he composed a bracing new opening *Allegro* (using a theme from a student quartet) and closing *Allegro deciso* finale. Atterberg's style did not change much over time, so he was able to get away with the mild discontinuity of the middle movements. The Stenhammar Quartet render it splendidly.

By this time, he had composed his second Quartet in B minor (1916), for long referred to just as 'String Quartet, Op 11', which is how it was issued on a Swedish Society LP and CD long ago in a vivid account by the Saulesco Quartet. (There is also a truncated recording on Caprice.) The new account by the Stenhammar Quartet is by a distance the front-runner: their tone, aided by CPO's warm and vibrant recording, is richer than their rivals and they catch its late-Romantic atmosphere superbly well.

The filler is no mere makeweight but the only contribution to the medium by Ture Rangström, 'A Nocturne in the manner of ETA Hoffmann' (1909). Hoffmann inspired a number of Rangström's works over the next 10 years. More a suite than a sonata structure, it is dedicated to Nielsen, who oversaw its composition from a distance; the version recorded here is that published posthumously and co-edited by Kallstenius and…Atterberg. **Guy Rickards**

## Beamish · Debussy

**Beamish** The Seafarer[a]
**Debussy** La mer (arr Beamish)
[a]**Sir Willard White** *voc* **Trio Apaches**
Orchid Ⓕ ORC100043 (53' • DDD)



The success of Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor may have come too late for Debussy to essay a mature one of his own but did provide a template for Sally Beamish when Trio Apaches asked her – despite her initial 'polite laughter' – to arrange *La mer* for piano, violin and cello. *La mer* is accessible in other transcriptions, of course, most notably for two pianos or piano duet, which provide a different but monochrome perspective on the music.

Beamish's arrangement for piano trio works very nicely, the two strings adding more variety of colour than a second keyboard. True, one misses the full orchestral power at the climaxes, but the trio format highlights details often lost in the wash of sound otherwise. Beamish's flair for writing for the ensemble shines through in her setting, for voice and trio, of Charles Harrison Wallace's translation of the great Anglo-Saxon poem 'The Seafarer'. Where *La mer* is a symphony on two notes in all but name, Beamish's *The Seafarer* (2000) is more overtly descriptive, a chamber fantasy for narrator and trio with superbly calculated effects to accompany the reading of the text, here dramatically and expressively rendered by Willard White, and organically derived musical flow running underneath for its full 28-minute length. Orchid's production values are strong, the sound clear, natural and very well balanced.
**Guy Rickards**

## Beethoven · Brahms · Weber

**Beethoven** Clarinet Trio, 'Gassenhauer', Op 11[a]
**Brahms** Clarinet Trio, Op 114[a]
**Weber** Grand duo concertant, Op 48
**Jon Manasse** *cl* [a]**Clive Greensmith** *vc*
**Jon Nakamatsu** *pf*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMU80 7618
(67' • DDD/DSD)



Berlioz in his *Treatise on Instrumentation and Orchestration* describes the clarinet as having 'a proud quality tempered by noble tenderness, which makes it ideal for expressing feelings and ideals of the most poetic kind'. It was Mozart who found a supreme use for it but Beethoven, whose Clarinet Trio was written in Vienna around 1797, was the first of the three composers here to be influenced by Mozart. His inspired work opens with an expressive *Allegro con brio* and has a characteristically jaunty theme-and-variations for a finale.

Brahms then followed in 1891 with the four-movement Clarinet Trio, one of his most endearing works. The first movement immediately displays the 'noble tenderness' Berlioz described and there is an autumnal feeling about the *Adagio* and the *Andantino grazioso* which prepares the listener for the bold final *Allegro*, which rather reminds us of the Double Concerto for violin and cello.

Weber's *Grand duo concertant*, written in 1815, brings out the extrovert, virtuoso nature of the clarinet, yet not missing its mellower tonal quality. The opening *Allegro* is a true *con fuoco*, to which Jon Manasse and Jon Nakamatsu certainly respond energetically, though not forgetting the lyrical element. Manasse then caresses the *Andante* beguilingly, though the pianist's scales offer contrast. The lilting Rondo finale ends the work with elated abandon. This is altogether a most enjoyable disc, beautifully played and recorded, with the three players joining together to make a perfect ensemble.
**Ivan March**

## Beethoven

'The Late String Quartets'
String Quartet No 13, Op 130.
Grosse Fuge, Op 133
**Brentano Quartet**
Aeon Ⓕ AECD1438 (61' • DDD)



All smiles: a happy scene at St George's, Bristol, as Sally Beamish joins Willard White and Trio Apaches at sessions for The Seafarer



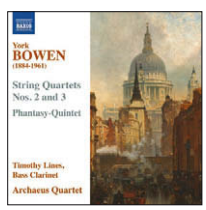

Initial brownie points on the issue of repeats, both in the first movement (fairly crucial in my view) and the perky replacement finale. Neither are observed that often. The expressive badinage between players, the enthusiastic rough and tumble in the opening *Allegro* with just a smidgen of tonal darkening for the second subject, not to mention the occasional hint of a *portamento*, place this performance securely in the realms of an inherited European tradition. The *Presto* second movement has a studied insouciance about it, until the madcap Trio, while the *Andante* opens broadly and turns artfully into the main body of the movement, which is beautifully played, with flexible tempi and an attentive attitude to matters of balance. An affecting and warm-textured account of the lovely *Cavatina* is possibly the highlight of the performance, the fragmented 'speaking' (or sobbing) commentary near the end, marked *beklemmt* (heavy at heart, oppressed), eloquently expressed by lead violinist Mark Steinberg. Beyond the *Cavatina* comes the replacement finale, in this context light, bouncy, unassuming and maddeningly inconclusive.

I'd recently been comparing the two recordings of Op 130 by the Tokyo Quartet (both newly reissued, the first on RCA, the second on Harmonia Mundi) and happily found that both place the *Grosse Fuge* in its rightful position as the quartet's finale. Once experienced in that way there's no going back, at least not in my view. My favourite recent version of the movement is by the Belcea Quartet, who not only fail to instate the *Fuge* as Op 130's denouement but programme it as part of an entirely different CD. Come on guys, at least give us the option! In any case the Brentano's otherwise energetic performance of the *Grosse Fuge* is marred by numerous tiny *ritardandos* that spoil the flow, and, for me, the concentration, but at least the recording captures the weight of Nina Maria Lee's excellent cello-playing. Of course not everyone will take my stance on the *Grosse Fuge* and as it's the least impressive segment of this particular performance it's hardly a vital consideration. In other respects, a strong, communicative interpretation, though I'll be staying loyal to the Takács, Tokyo and Juilliard Quartets, all of which, as it happens, round Op 130 off with that shattering *Great Fugue*. **Rob Cowan**

*Selected comparisons:*
*Juilliard Qt (2/98) (SONY) SK62792*
*Takács Qt (5/05) (DECC) 470 849-2DH3*
*Tokyo Qt (11/10) (HARM)*
*HMU80 7641/8 or HMU80 7481/3*
*Belcea Qt (8/13) (ZZT) ZZT321*
*Tokyo Qt (RCA) 88691 97578-2*

## Bowen

String Quartets – No 2, Op 41; No 3, Op 46*b*. Phantasy Quintet, Op 93[a]
[a]**Timothy Lines** *bcl* **Archaeus Quartet**
Naxos Ⓑ 8 571366 (70' • DDD)
From BMS BMS426CD (9/02)




With each recording of York Bowen's chamber music, it becomes clear just how accomplished a composer he was. The two string quartets featured here, the Second of *c*1918 and the Third of 1919, together with the rather later *Phantasy Quintet* of 1932, demonstrate that his chamber output was not technically biased towards works with piano, the instrument on which he himself excelled. Both quartets favour a three-

movement plan and the formal models are essentially classical. Nevertheless, within these clean-cut frameworks, the thematic and harmonic world is a passionately romantic one, full of nostalgia and inner melancholy, aspects of the music not lost on the Archaeus Quartet, whose full tone brings life to these neglected and technically challenging scores.

The fine Second Quartet in D minor, Op 41, a Carnegie Award-winner in 1922, presents its own difficulties in the high lines for cello and viola in the slow movement, and in the rapid *moto perpetuo* passages in the finale. The Third Quartet in G major, Op 46*b* is, by contrast, lighter and more intimate, with an especially attractive finale. Most remarkable is the *Phantasy Quintet* for bass clarinet and string quartet, a combination which lends an almost Gothic darkness to the work's sound world. Rich in melodic invention, this terse, vivid yet haunting canvas of only 14 minutes, beautifully written for the ensemble (with some spirited playing from the bass clarinettist Timothy Lines), is a real find and deserves to be better known.

**Jeremy Dibble**

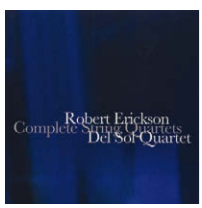
## Erickson

'Complete String Quartets'

String Quartets – No 1; No 2. Solstice. Corfu

**Del Sol Quartet**

New World Ⓕ ② NW80753-2 (84' • DDD)




This is the first music by Robert Erickson (1917-97) that I have encountered (although New World has issued several others – note to self: investigate these further). Of humble origins, he was attracted to music as a child, eventually, by a rather roundabout, non-musical route, becoming an esteemed teacher with some impressive compositions to his name, including some early string quartets.

Erickson's First Quartet was written piecemeal between August 1948 and January 1950. Rhythmically sprightly, it is written in a mildly, not unattractively expressionist language that owes something to Alban Berg, whose *Lyric Suite* made a profound impression on the young composer. Cast in three movements (fast-slow-fast), it shows a mastery of the conversational medium but formally is a touch stiff. The freewheeling single-movement Second Quartet (1956) followed after a period of silence and represents a quantum leap in expressive imagination. It is a most impressive achievement.

The two unnumbered quartets, *Solstice* and *Corfu*, date from the mid-1980s. *Solstice* was composed during – and inspired by – the period of the winter solstice in December 1984, especially in the weeks or two either side 'when the days are trying to decide whether to get shorter or longer'. A vivid, attractive fantasia, its sectional structure is belied by the sections mostly flowing into and out of each other. *Corfu* (1985) is similar in design but 'bare and stripped down'. Erickson was obsessed during its composition by the civilisations of ancient Greece, though there is no specific connection to Corfu itself, which Erickson never visited. The Del Sol Quartet play with conviction, sounding right inside the idiom. New World's recording is clear and natural, the players closely miked. Recommended. **Guy Rickards**

## Fauré · Franck · Poulenc

**Fauré** Violin Sonata No 1, Op 13

**Franck** Violin Sonata **Poulenc** Violin Sonata

**Giovanni Guzzo** *vn* **Anne Lovett** *pf*

Champs Hill Ⓕ CHRCD081 (69' • DDD)




It's a shame that Saint-Saëns couldn't have been as nice about Franck's Violin Sonata as he was about Fauré's ('with this work, Monsieur Fauré takes his place among the masters'), as they sit in companionable accomplishment on this disc. Both present radical musical ideas without outwardly breaking with tradition, and provide a comforting journey through the misty lyricism of their musical predecessors. No wonder, then, that they're both so prolifically recorded. But although this recording is noticeably more spacious than some may consider comfortable (the piano in particular is set so far away in Champs Hill's spacious acoustic that it sounds as if it is calling to the violin from another room), these are careful and insightful performances of pieces whose identities are predicated upon profoundly different principles.

Fauré's constant unfolding of melody and Franck's examination of a single, tiny motif and the infinity of its possibilities are presented equally skilfully as being as intimate as they are radiant (Franck) or buoyant (Fauré). They are sandwiched around Poulenc's Violin Sonata, reluctantly written over a long period in the 1940s but which, although an enormous contrast to its disc-mates, still has melody and shares the same sense of equality between the instruments. In fact, all three sonatas are conjoined by this need to combine exuberance with calm to avoid losing their different subtleties, and this Guzzo and Lovett do with great poise and elegant understatement. **Caroline Gill**

## Fauré · Lekeu · Ravel

'French Violin Sonatas'

**Fauré** Violin Sonata No 1, Op 13 **Lekeu** Violin Sonata **Ravel** Sonata Movement

**Tasmin Little** *vn* **Martin Roscoe** *pf*

Chandos Ⓕ CHAN10812 (73' • DDD)




Tasmin Little and Martin Roscoe give a passionate, full-blooded performance of the Lekeu Sonata, taking on board the 22-year-old composer's lofty tone and high ambitions. Their approach is aided by a fine, generous recording; and if in the outer movements the displays of intense emotion seem occasionally excessive, this can be seen as part of the work's character. It's a different style of performance from Ibragimova and Tiberghien's, on their 2010 recording. They give greater emphasis to the quieter, more delicate passages, with Ibragimova's more narrowly focused tone providing emotional tension through intense *legato*, in contrast to Little's more opulent sound. But the only place where Ibragimova and Tiberghien score decisively over Little and Roscoe is in the melody of the central movement, *Très lent*, where their restraint creates a beautiful mesmerising effect, missing with the more overt Roscoe and Little.

The early Ravel Sonata Movement brings a quite different style of playing, suited to the music's refined elegance and evocation of remote modal melody. The more emphatic, stressful moments stand out in powerful relief as a result.

In the Fauré, Little and Roscoe develop a feeling of irresistible momentum in the outer movements, matching the composer's unstoppable flow of ideas. They're just as impressive in the witty, skittish *scherzo*, with its lyrical countermelodies. For me, the performance doesn't quite match the joyfulness and sharp expressive character – touching or thrilling – of the 1950 recording by Lola Bobescu and Jacques Genty but it still conveys the essential, inspired character of Fauré's first instrumental masterpiece.

**Duncan Druce**

*Lekeu – selected comparison:*

*Ibragimova, Tiberghien (A/11) (HYPE) CDA67820*

*Fauré – selected comparison:*

*Bobescu, Genty (TEST) SBT1360*

## Fauré · Pierné

**Fauré** Piano Trio, Op 120
**Pierné** Piano Trio, Op 45
**Trio Wanderer**
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC90 2192 (58' • DDD)




Gabriel Pierné's star seems to be in the ascendant at the moment. A few months back there was a fine reading of his Piano Quintet from the Goldner Quartet and Piers Lane (Hyperion, 5/14). Now the Wanderer offer a comparably compelling recording of his Trio. Heard 'blind', you'd be hard-pressed to guess this was written in 1921, which perhaps helps to explain why it's not better known. It's a work that grows out of the tradition in which Pierné was ensconced, and its broad expanse and darkly turbulent Romanticism palpably grow from the tradition of Franck, who had been one of his teachers.

The very opening theme, in the piano's lower register, sets up a disquiet that pervades much of the opening movement. There's some superbly effective writing for violin and cello at the movement's midpoint, and the Wanderer balance rhetoric and stillness to great effect. Pierné's lighter side is revealed in the *Allegretto scherzando*, with some nicely punchy *pizzicato* from the string players. The finale is a taxing and imaginative set of variations on an initially austere theme. As the movement progresses, Pierné is unsparing of his players but the Wanderer rise to every challenge, and the piece ends in a gloriously affirmative manner.

Fauré's Trio is also in a sense out of its time and it was completed only in 1923. The Wanderer's reading is full of warmth and intimacy, which is particularly appealing in the opening movement. Their *Andantino* is deeply conversational from the outset, not dissimilar in approach to Eric Le Sage and his colleagues on their recent Alpha disc. But I've come to find a more held-back, cooler beginning even more effective here, something superbly achieved by the Capuçons and Angelich and by Trio George Sand, both of whom convey more searingly the movement's sense of quiet desperation.

The finale is spiritedly played but it's less 'French'-sounding than some. This is partly down to the less fingery style of the Wanderer's pianist (just try Le Sage by comparison); and others also find a greater degree of wistfulness in this strangely angular movement, notably the Florestan and Trio George Sand. So a clear recommendation for the Pierné but a slightly more guarded one for Fauré.

**Harriet Smith**

*Fauré – selected comparisons:*
*Florestan Trio (3/00) (HYPE) CDA67114*
*R & G Capuçon, Angelich (12/11) (VIRG) 070875-2*
*Trio George Sand (7/12) (ZZT) ZZT120101*
*Le Sage et al (3/14) (ALPH) ALPHA603*

## Haydn

String Quartets, Op 20
**Doric Quartet**
Chandos Ⓑ ② CHAN10831 (150' • DDD)




Papa Haydn. Is he, in today's pejorative meaning, pretty close to the image of a simpleton? The Doric Quartet say differently; and to hear how, sample the first-movement *Allegro con spirito* of No 3, of music that lurches, hesitates and restarts, from musicians who feel a personal struggle portraying it through varied bowing and a state of tension that remains stretched even during silences. They confront the intractable; and exempt only the outer movements of this work from second-half repeats. Thus do unusual endings surprise when heard only once.

Thoughtfulness is uppermost. Allied to precision in articulation is a flexibility in the scansion and shaping of phrases, of notes timed through a remarkable understanding of *rubato*, of a range of expressive resilience that gives even the smallest of episodes in a long line their own character without distorting structure or disturbing flow, eg speed combining with jest in the *Allegro di molto e scherzando* of No 6. Stay to experience Haydn's resourceful use of colour, the Minuet bright, the Trio – without second violin – slower and subdued, played *sopra una corda* (on one string), its ambience intensified by startlingly different tonal hues; which brings matters round to the nub of these works – the slow movements, be it the *Affettuoso e sostenuto* of No 1, the *Capriccio* of No 2 or the *Adagio* of No 5, each one divined to be of glowing or grave beauty. And this is Vol 1. Hold your breath for the rest. **Nalen Anthoni**

*Selected comparison:*
*London Haydn Qt (A/11) (HYPE) CDA67877*

## Langgaard

'String Quartets, Vol 3'
String Quartets – No 1, BVN68; No 5, BVN189. Quartet Movement, 'Italian Scherzo', BVN408
**Nightingale Quartet**
Dacapo Ⓕ 6 220577 (69' • DDD/DSD)




*Gramophone*'s conferment of Young Artists of the Year on the Nightingale Quartet is no less than these four intrepid artists deserve. Their Langgaard cycle is bringing this maverick composer the kind of broader recognition he always deserved, and their playing on this final volume lives up to the sky-high standards they have led us to expect.

In his booklet essay, Tim Frederiksen, who has mentored the Nightingales throughout the process, characterises the first CD as mainly dramatic and the second as predominantly poetic and idyllic, while the third embraces both aspects and thereby makes a fitting conclusion. Both quartets recorded here fit that description (the *Italian Scherzo* is a chip from the workbench, though an engaging one). The First – all 37 minutes of it – is the more deceptive, in a way that anyone already attuned to Langgaard will relish. The leisurely first movement manages to behave itself but the *scherzo* evidently has trouble keeping the lid on, and imaginative transgression bursts through on the last page (I wondered at this point if Langgaard may have known Borodin's First Quartet). The long slow movement returns to sobriety for the most part but becomes seriously disruptive in the late stages, while the finale moves from initial entrancement to an energised *robusto* coda.

The Fifth Quartet is altogether milder. It starts with a respectful nod to Grieg and continues with a mainly reflective, leisurely first movement. Still, like the British weather, if you don't like it, all you have to do is wait a bit. The finale is especially changeable; and even though this work might not be the one to choose to induct a friend to Langgaard, it has a winning charm that doesn't pale on repetition. Beautifully judged recording quality and authoritative essays complement the performances ideally. **David Fanning**

## Liszt · R Strauss · Wagner

'Reminiscences'
**Liszt** Première Elégie, S130*ter*. Romance oubliée, S132*ter*. Am Grabe Richard Wagners, S135 **R Strauss** Violin Sonata, Op 18. An einsamer Quelle, Op 9 No 2. Cäcilie, Op 27 No 2 **Wagner** Mignonne. Wesendonck-Lieder – Träume. Albumblatt. Ankunft bei den schwarzen Schwänen. Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg – Prize Song
**Lisa Schatzman** *vn* **Benjamin Engeli** *pf*
Claves Ⓕ 50-1103 (67' • DDD)

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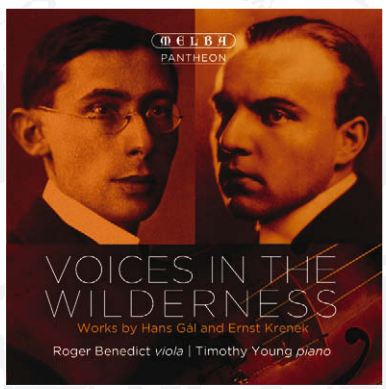
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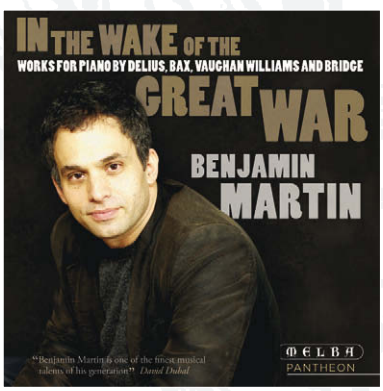
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The composer's names are familiar but the titles – and the medium in which they're written – are mostly unknown. Having defined big-orchestra 19th-century composition, Wagner, Liszt and Strauss are heard here in transcriptions, early works and private pieces that aren't widely known, many of them originating as songs – and reminding us how often that was at the core of their grandest conceptions. Revelations? I didn't have any; but the album is pleasant company, thanks partly to the ingratiating playing and acoustically inviting sound of the disc.

The better-known pieces include a transcript of Wagner's 'Träume' from the *Wesendonck-Lieder* and the Strauss song 'Cäcilie'. Less known are some songs that Wagner wrote, whether early on or for special occasions, reminding you how inconsequential he could be while writing on demand. Performing songs that began with words but lost them in transciption requires a particular kind of charisma (Fritz Kreisler had it but not Isaac Stern) that I don't hear here.

Most interesting are the three Liszt pieces, which may not be major but are certainly earnest, with his singular fusion of spirituality and sentimentality, skirting that line from bar to bar amid the *Parsifal* quotations in *Am Grabe Richard Wagners*. Strauss's Violin Sonata, Op 18, written when the composer was 24, should be more evolved than it is; perhaps the composer was making one last pass through the techniques of his elders before breaking forth with a harmonic signature that would serve him for roughly 60 years. Not pieces that need to be heard often – even in performances as winning as these.

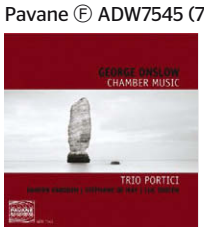
**David Patrick Stearns**

## Onslow

Piano Trio, Op 14 No 2. Duo, Op 15. Cello Sonata, Op 16 No 1

**Trio Portici**

Pavane Ⓕ ADW7545 (70' • DDD)




George Onslow's natural melodic gift is enhanced here by the engagingly spontaneous playing of the Trio Portici and especially the nimble contribution of the pianist, Stéphane de May. But the others, Damien Pardoen (violin) and Luc Tooten (cello) play with equal style and spontaneity.

The Piano Trio may have the reputation of owing much to Beethoven but it is still very much Onslow's own. It opens with a friendly theme, decorated by the piano, and proceeds with a wonderful freshness. Its dancing Minuet is as light as thistledown, and the jaunty Trio is captivating. Then follows an engaging set of variations on an 'Air populaire des montagnes d'Auvergne' which the composer knew so well. The finale romps away spontaneously (again the piano part is felicitous).

The Duo for piano and violin opens very gently and mysteriously with a serene *Largo* and then whirls off into a joyful *Allegro vivace* (again the ear can't miss the piano's fast quavers). The Minuet has a more solemn Trio but its mood is only briefly held. The *Andante* is another winning set of variations on 'Au clair de la lune' and the work closes happily with a *moto perpetuo* with a touch of fugato.

The Cello Sonata is rather more restrained, a real duet, opening in simple lyrical warmth, proceeding to a lovely, almost Schubertian *Andante*, and ending with a warmly peaceful *Allegretto*. Altogether an enchanting collection, beautifully recorded. **Ivan March**

## Reich

Radio Rewrite[a]. Electric Counterpoint[b]. Piano Counterpoint[c]

[c]**Vicky Chow** *pf* [b]**Jonny Greenwood** *gtr*

[a]**Alarm Will Sound / Alan Pierson**

Nonesuch Ⓔ 7559 79547-0 (46' • DDD)




Over the years a significant number of rock and pop musicians have acknowledged their debt to Steve Reich, as seen in recordings that range from mere stylistic appropriation (Kraftwerk or King Crimson) to more direct homage in DJ remixes of specific compositions. *Radio Rewrite* sees Reich finally returning the compliment, which is unusual given his general uninterest in musical quotation. Composed in 2013 for an 11-piece ensemble consisting of winds, strings and Reich's trademark pairing of two pianos and two mallet instruments, *Radio Rewrite* threads two songs by British rock band Radiohead into its taut five-movement format.

The first, third and fifth movements draw on the opening chord sequence of Radiohead's 'Jigsaw falling into place', while the second and fourth movements

# IN THE STUDIO

**An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording**

- **Van Bloss moves to Beethoven**
  Pianist **Nick van Bloss** has been recording at Wyastone Concert Hall for his new disc on Nimbus, a recording of Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations and Piano Sonata No 23, the *Appassionata* – more heavyweight repertoire following his recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in 2011. Nimbus will release the disc next March.

- **Shaham Bach**
  As this issue of *Gramophone* went to press, violinist **Gil Shaham** was finishing his recording of Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin at the studios of Bavarian Radio in Munich. Look out for the resulting disc on Canary Classics, Shaham's own label, in 2015.



- **More Berlioz from Ticciati**
  Following a 2013 collaboration which resulted in a winning recording of *L'enfance du Christ* (see page 120), **Robin Ticciati** (above) has been back in Stockholm with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra to record Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*. Linn will release the disc next year.

- **Jurowski's vinyl Brahms**
  Live recordings of the Brahms symphonies from **Vladimir Jurowski** and his London Philharmonic Orchestra which have already been released on CD (5/10, 3/14) will be issued on vinyl early in the new year. Jurowski, a vinyl lover, was presented with a 'surprise' first pressing of the LPO label records at a recent concert and was said to be 'over the moon' with excitement at the venture.

- **Tippett from the Heath**
  Wigmore Hall Live will issue concert recordings of the complete string quartets of Sir Michael Tippett as performed at the hall by the **Heath Quartet**. Expect the first disc in the spring of next year.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCOBORGGREVE

make use of harmonic patterns found in the more ambient, electronically generated sound world of 'Everything in its right place'. While these references are never made explicit (Reich states rather cryptically that 'sometimes you hear them and sometimes you don't'), *Radio Rewrite* preserves much of the dark, edgy expression of the original tracks.

The work that brought Reich's music to pop audiences, *Electric Counterpoint*, is also included here – performed in an act of reciprocal appreciation by Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood. As might be expected from a musician of rock proclivities, Greenwood's rendition is crisper and more direct than Pat Metheny's original recording. Metheny's smooth, jazz-inflected articulation is replaced with a more detached and slightly grittier sound, with ostensibly less studio manipulation. The overall impression is of a more 'live' sound, if that's not too much of a contradiction for a piece largely created out of pre-recorded guitar parts.

The final work on this disc, *Piano Counterpoint*, is also a 'rewrite' of sorts. An arrangement by Vincent Corver of Reich's much earlier *Six Pianos*, *Piano Counterpoint* conflates two of its six piano lines into one virtuoso part (played with crystal-clear precision by Vicky Chow), while the rest are pre-recorded in a similar manner to Reich's other counterpoint pieces. If nothing else, this highly concentrated, pocket-size version of *Six Pianos* demonstrates the relative ease with which a previously 'pure' minimalist composition can turn into something far more post-minimally accessible. While it works on a certain level, one suspects that the younger Reich would not have approved. **Pwyll ap Sion**

## Schubert

'1828'

Piano Sonata No 20, D959. Rondo, D951[a]. Allegro, 'Lebensstürme', D947[a]. Fantasie, D940[a]

**Philippe Cassard**, [a]**Cédric Pescia** *pf*

La Dolce Volta Ⓕ LDV15 (78' • DDD)




The title '1828' refers to Schubert's final and astoundingly productive year, which brought forth the three duets and solo sonata featured on this disc. In Philippe Cassard's hands, the declamatory dynamism of the D959 A major Sonata's first-movement exposition takes a back seat, with an emphasis on shapely soft playing that ravishingly comes to roost throughout the movement's development section. The pianist's eloquent *legato* holds attention in the *Andantino*'s outer sections, yet he downplays the harrowing chromatic climax. He similarly understates the *Scherzo*'s explosive descending minor scales, yet his delicate, witty arpeggiation of the main theme's leaping chords delights. While the Rondo gains assurance and momentum as it progresses, I prefer Pollini's firmer left-hand projection in the explosive central minor episode and the intelligent architecture of his dynamics.

Cédric Pescia joins Cassard for the duets, starting with a genial and leisurely spin through the A major Rondo that differs from the faster, more transparent and poetically pliable Argerich/Freire miracle on DG. Does the strident, overly resonant recorded sound make the *Lebensstürme* sound more monochrome than it actually is? But the duo's straightforward, thoughtfully balanced F minor Fantasy boasts more colour and nuance, and benefits from cohesive tempo relationships, albeit without the Perahia/Lupu linear interplay in the slow F sharp minor episode's soft passages. As always with La Dolce Volta, the packaging is first-rate, with excellent graphics and artwork, and provocative booklet-notes that, among other things, make no apology for trimming repeats. **Jed Distler**

*D959 – selected comparison:*
*Pollini (4/88[R], 5/89[R]) (DG)*
*474 613-2GOR2 or 479 2290GB3*
*D951 – selected comparison:*
*Argerich, Freire (12/09) (DG) 477 8570GH*
*D940 – selected comparison:*
*Perahia, Lupu (3/86[R]) (SONY)*
*SK39511 or 88697 85811-2*

## Ustvolskaya

Violin Sonata. Duet. Clarinet Trio[a]

[a]**Reto Bieri** *cl*/**Patricia Kopatchinskaja** *vn*

**Markus Hinterhäuser** *pf*

ECM New Series Ⓕ 481 0883 (68' • DDD)




The belated recognition of Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006) as a figure of importance tailed off once the limited extent of her acknowledged output (anything of even obliquely Socialist Realist nature rigorously excluded) had been covered on disc. Yet there was certainly a need for one that featured all three of her works for violin and piano. Kopatchinskaja – the most combative female violinist of her generation – proves an ideal exponent.

Separated by just over a decade, these pieces constitute a telling overview of the composer's evolution during that time. Already with the Clarinet Trio (1949) there is a tendency to move away from tensile thematic development, inherited from her teacher Shostakovich, towards the starkly gestural manner that came to the fore with the Violin Sonata (1952). Here a multi-movement sequence can be discerned; the determining principle is of vividly defined motifs in constant variation – maintaining their rhythmic profile despite (or because of?) the volatile interplay of violin and piano. Formal continuity had disappeared in the Duet (1964), its half-hour span focusing on that limited pool of gestures whose initially confrontational progress reaches a peak of anguish just past the midpoint; passing into a subdued stand-off with the main motifs gradually dispersed by a silence that ultimately proves all-enveloping.

Music such as this admits of no false compromise and accordingly finds doughty advocacy in Kopatchinskaja – ably partnered by Markus Hinterhäuser and, in the Trio, by Reto Bieri. The sound has a suitably unsparing immediacy, though Paul Griffiths's note rather risks tying the listener up in knots. Not that this prevents this disc taking its place at the forefront of the Ustvolskaya discography.

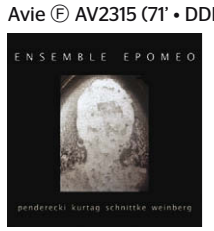
**Richard Whitehouse**

## Ensemble Epomeo

**Kurtág** Signs, Games and Messages **Penderecki** String Trio **Schnittke** String Trio **Weinberg** String Trio

**Ensemble Epomeo**

Avie Ⓕ AV2315 (71' • DDD)




Here is a worthwhile survey of string trios that are more usually heard as part of composer compilations. The Ensemble Epomeo are persuasive advocates for each piece, and their hearts, brains and fingers are certainly in the right place. The trouble is that competition is fierce. Turn to any of the comparative versions listed below and the difference in terms of weight of tone, range of colour and sheer communicative energy is immediately apparent. Such performances haunt the imagination long after they are over, whereas the Ensemble Epomeo merely command respect. I was certainly glad to encounter Kurtág's frequently Bartókian *Signs*, *Games and Messages* but even here I can imagine others upscaling the Epomeo's relish and attack into something more memorable. For a handy compilation of modern string trios,

the new disc can be welcomed. But given that Avie's recording quality lacks a degree of warmth and bloom, it's hard to put it more enthusiastically than that. **David Fanning**

*Penderecki – selected comparison:*
*Deutsches Streichtrio (CPO) CPO999 730-2*
*Schnittke – selected comparison:*
*Kremer, Bashmet, Rostropovich (5/96) (EMI) 555627-2*
*Weinberg – selected comparison:*
*Kremerata Baltica (4/14) (ECM) 481 0669*

## 'Seldom Sene'

'A Musical Mosaic Spanning Five Centuries'
**JS Bach** Fantasia, BWV904. Fugue, BWV546. Brandenburg Concerto No 6, BWV1051 – Allegro **Boismortier** Concerto for Five Flutes, Op 15 No 2 **A Cabezón** Susanne un jour **Caldini** Die Sonne **Coprario** Fantasia after Marenzio's 'O voi che suspirate' **Frenzel** Choral Prelude, 'Aus tiefer Not' **Gallus** Mirabile mysterium **Geysen** Omtrent A-B-C **Holborne** Almayne. The Fruit of Love. The Image of Melancholly **R Johnson** A knell of Johnson **Josquin Desprez** La Spagna **Nasopoulou** Lelia doura **Reger** Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, Op 135*a* No 4 **Tallis** O sacrum convivium **Tye** Seldom sene **Victoria** Ave regina caelorum a 8
**Taracea**
Brilliant Classics Ⓑ 94871 (77' • DDD)




The subtitle suggests a spanning of 'five centuries'; I make it six, perhaps even seven. Be that as it may, the range of styles in this enterprising recital is only the most striking of several distinctive features. The programme is carefully chosen, the passage between styles cleverly judged on the whole, the contemporary works included here being especially well integrated. The only possible stylistic 'dissonance' to strike me forcibly was the sudden jolt from Max Reger into the finale of Bach's Sixth *Brandenburg Concerto* – oddly enough, since other juxtapositions that seem more forced on paper work better.

The fugal Bach Fantasia, BWV904, is more satisfying, for the recorder consort's wonderful transparency makes it an effective vehicle for polyphony: Cabezón's setting of *Susanne un jour* and the Holborne Pavan and Almain are a delight. Boismortier's Concerto Op 15 No 2 is one of the discoveries of the disc, and Frenzel's brooding setting of *Aus tiefer Not* shows off the consort's lower instruments to great effect. The recorder consort's limitations as a chamber ensemble show, however, when the music seems to demand a grittier timbre or a more emphatic approach to phrasing, as in the Tye In nomine or Jacobus Gallus's chromatic *Mirabile mysterium*. But these observations are outweighed by the commitment, technical versatility, unanimity of ensemble and near-immaculate tuning on display.
**Fabrice Fitch**


Incomparable: Patricia Kopatchinskaja champions the music of Galina Ustvolskaya with typical irreverance

## 'Tre Voci'

**Debussy** Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp **Gubaidulina** Garten von Freuden und Traurigkeiten **Takemitsu** And then I knew 'twas wind
**Marina Piccinini** *fl* **Kim Kashkashian** *va* **Sivan Magen** *hp*
ECM New Series Ⓕ 481 0880 (51' • DDD)




Debussy's extraordinary work used to be found in collections of chamber music by his contemporaries and immediate successors. Ravel, Guy Ropartz and Roussel provided the couplings in what remains perhaps its most famous recorded outing, on a disc featuring Richard Adeney (flute), Osian Ellis (harp) and Cecil Aronowitz (viola). Reviewing the LP in 1962, *Gramophone* dismissed the piece as 'inconsequential' – a reminder that critical opinion never stands still.

In another time and place, Armenian-American ECM regular Kim Kashkashian and her colleagues take the long view, placing the seminal Sonata for flute, viola and harp in the context of more recent compositions for identical forces. Debussy's innovations are discussed in some detail in the elegant accompanying booklet. If that sounds challenging, the music is anything but. Indeed, while playing and production are exquisite throughout, you may find your attention wandering a little in the subtle and sophisticated companion pieces.

Takemitsu's ethereal reflections are profoundly affected by the example of the French master. Gubaidulina's 18-minute musical landscape, also cast in a single movement, has been recorded before but these players guarantee it a more permanent place in the lists. Some rate its fusion of East and West very highly indeed. Others, myself included, find its sonic explorations more than a little diffuse. It ends here with an optional spoken passage from the work of Viennese poet Francisco Tanzer, one half of the poetic background to a score inspired too by the Armenian balladeer celebrated in Parajanov's film *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

At the core of this beautifully presented programme is a wonderfully keen-eared, uncommonly spacious account of Debussy's Sonata for flute, viola and harp.
**David Gutman**

*Debussy – selected comparison:*
*Melos Ens (9/62[R]) (ELOQ) ELQ480 2153*

PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIEL VASS/ECM RECORDS

# Barry Rose

**Andrew Mellor salutes the organist and choir trainer, 80 this year, who came from nowhere to change procedures and standards in church music-making for ever**

On May 17, 1961, the first cathedral to be designed entirely to order in England since St Paul's was consecrated. Almost everything about the place and the event was unusual. The cathedral wasn't situated within the town it served, but overlooking it. It was encased in utilitarian red bricks instead of carved and cantilevered stonework. But inside it on that day – resounding through the pure, minimalist nave described by Pevsner as 'curvilinear gothic' – a choir sang that could stand comparison with the best of its kind. Its boys and men had been singing together not for seven centuries, but for seven months.

The next day, the composer Herbert Howells scribbled a handwritten note to Guildford Cathedral's organist, Barry Rose. 'So many of us, to whom music in the church and cathedral means so much, will wish you, as I do, constant support and happiness in your work at Guildford,' wrote Howells. As he did so, Rose was readying his choir to sing the new cathedral's inaugural Evensong – the very first in a cycle of daily sung services that continues to this day.

*'It was an utterly heavenly sound: floating, glowing, patient, rich and astoundingly blended'*

Guildford Cathedral was never supposed to have daily choral services. For a period, it wasn't even supposed to have a choir (one early concept was for a 'spoken word' cathedral; the interior of Sir Edward Maufe's building was to be lined with plaster designed acoustically to favour speech over music). But Rose had different ideas. As a 25-year-old insurance salesman turned jobbing choir trainer without a university education, he was interviewed for the Guildford job and stormed out – frustrated by the academic approach of the selection panel. But his insistence that the new building should have daily singing struck a chord with one of them. Walter Boulton, Guildford's provost, chased Rose into the street and persuaded him to visit Guildford the next day. Rose did, and was offered the job there and then. Immediately he set about establishing a choir that would change church music-making in Britain – both stylistically and logistically.

I first heard that choir on a 2001 episode of BBC Radio's *Choral Evensong* – the programme Rose went on to produce, exercising a significant influence on the sound of so many ecclesiastical choirs throughout the land. It was a retrospective episode marking 75 years of the programme, compiling archived excerpts from the best broadcasts down the years. All the Guildford choir sang was a chanted portion of Psalm 119, recorded in 1974. But that was enough. It told you exactly why these musicians had become the stuff of legend. There was the airy, ethereal tone of the famous Choir of King's College, Cambridge, but without any of their occasional manners, edge or strain. It was, to call on a horrendous cliché, an utterly heavenly sound: floating, glowing, patient, rich, astoundingly blended yet rooted in the text.

Rose built it all on a wing and a prayer. His Guildford trebles began with minimal experience and no senior boys to learn from by osmosis; his men were underpaid and itinerant but came to Guildford – often from the back rows of far more famous choirs – to be part of something special, something new. Technology was vital. Rose would record services and play the results back to keep the learning curve steep. Soon enough, the choir forged a relationship with EMI that saw it make what was, for over two decades, the best-selling church music recording in history: 'Christmas Carols from Guildford Cathedral' (1966, the first classical recording on the Music for Pleasure imprint). Around the same time, and long before the LSO and RLPO did the same, the choir formed its own label (Guild Records), gifting itself autonomy and control in the process.

After a decade and a half in Guildford, Rose moved to St Paul's, and from there to St Albans. Both cathedral choirs felt the effects of his unrelenting high standards. Following his retirement in 1997 he became a frequent visitor to cathedral music departments (more often Chelmsfords and Blackburns than Winchesters and Canterburys), imparting gentle wisdoms to choristers concealed in his endearing ordinary-bloke manner.

## DEFINING MOMENTS

**•1960**
Rose is controversially appointed the first Organist at Guildford Cathedral – having walked out of the selection interview.

**•1964**
Rose's Guildford choir makes its first recording for EMI; *Gramophone* concludes that 'the choir is ineffably smooth'.

**•1967**
Rose and his right-hand Guildford lay clerk Roger Lowman form Guild Records – engineering, producing and editing recordings themselves.

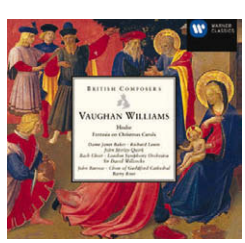
**•1981**
After seven years at St Paul's Cathedral, Rose masterminds the music for the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

**•1988**
Rose takes his last cathedral music position: Master of the Music at St Alban's Abbey in Hertfordshire.



And in his 80th year, his legacy is palpable. The model of a permanent presence 'downstairs' – the 'organist' working with his choir, an assistant organist accompanying it – was nurtured by Rose. It was he who proved that an ensemble of children and adults could sing daily to the highest standards without the support of a choir school. His shepherding of the weekly *Choral Evensong* programme in the 1970s and '80s saw his ideas about blend, tone and text – particularly in psalm-singing (a homage to one of his great musical heroes, George Guest) – seep into choir stalls around the land. That, and *Choral Evensong* became a properly 'produced' entity: a programme in which individual musical and architectural characteristics were celebrated.

Appropriately, given the non-Establishment footing of the whole Guildford project, many of the choir's recordings have been posted online (some on YouTube, some on Rose's own website, **barryrose.co.uk**). Even at their most homespun, you sense something special in them – a mixture of cohesion, zest and transcendence that calls to mind Rose's famous, Fürtwangler-like remark to his singers that 'the beat is irrelevant'. Rose wanted his musicians to *feel* the music they were singing just like he did. Only that way would choirs, congregations and listeners grow to love it like he did, too. G




## THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

**Vaughan Williams**
Fantasia on Christmas Carols
**John Barrow** *bar*
**Guildford Cathedral Choir / Barry Rose**
Warner Classics Ⓑ 567427-2 (12/66R)

# Instrumental



Harriet Smith on Mendelssohn's piano songs from Javier Perianes: *'There's clarity to Perianes's fugal textures and the work's fleeting moods are masterfully handled'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 76



William Yeoman on a disc 'ideal for classical guitar newbies': *'Sandsengen's best playing is by turns emphatic, fragile, bold, tender and wild'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 81

## JS Bach

Six Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012
**Viola de Hoog** *vc*
Vivat Ⓑ ② VIVAT107 (135' • DDD)




Viola de Hoog was the cellist of the Schoenberg Quartet. However, alongside her affinity with the music of the Second Viennese School, she has developed all the requirements of technique and stylistic sensitivity to be a formidable player of the Baroque form of her instrument.

This issue is noteworthy for its fine sound and for the elegance and finesse of the playing. De Hoog has a light touch when playing chords: in the Allemande of the Sixth Suite she sketches in the harmony while allowing the listener to concentrate on the beautiful, ornamented melodic line. Another recurring attribute is her poised vigour in the quicker dances, for instance the lively Courantes of the first three Suites. In the corresponding movement of the Fifth Suite, however, her search for liveliness leads to a hurried tempo; I feel that this Courante, closer to the French manner of Couperin, demands a more relaxed approach. And I'm not entirely convinced by the different tempi adopted for the pairs of minuets in the first two Suites. But elsewhere de Hoog, even at her most individual, is entirely convincing. This is certainly the case with her account of the Prelude to the First Suite – spacious and meditative, with a pervasive expressive *rubato*.

The other preludes similarly have a distinct character. I especially enjoyed the start of the Fourth Suite which, with its awkward leaps, can sound uncomfortable but here sounds entirely suave and natural. The Sixth Suite's Prelude, too, is pervaded by a joyful, bouncy sense of rhythm.

Viola de Hoog's interpretations place her midway between two other distinguished Baroque cello accounts. Jaap ter Linden is a very fluent player but his smoother style results in performances that appear less lively and imaginative than de Hoog's, and his heavier playing of chords tends to interrupt the music's flow. Roel Dieltiens's performances adopt a more forceful, often virtuoso manner, with more detached and *staccato* playing, and sharper characterisation. That is a most striking issue but I imagine many listeners will prefer Viola de Hoog's gentler approach, as well as the more spacious recording and emollient tone. **Duncan Druce**

*Selected comparisons:*
*Ter Linden (10/97R, 5/04) (HARM) HMX290 7346/7*
*Dieltiens (2/11) (ETCE) KTC1403*

## JS Bach

French Overture, BWV831. Aria variata alla maniera italiana, BWV989. Concerto (after Marcello), BWV974. Italian Concerto, BWV971
**Vladimir Ashkenazy** *pf*
Decca Ⓕ 478 6773DH (67' • DDD)



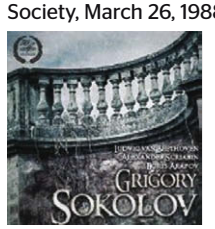

The high standards of Vladimir Ashkenazy's previous two solo Bach outings operate less consistently in the present release. Observing full repeats in the *French Overture*'s opening movement, the pianist treats the introduction's smaller note values and rests flexibly, in contrast to Angela Hewitt's fastidious detailing. He gives distinction to the main section's *forte* and *piano* markings, and as well in the concluding Echo movement. Note the Courante's characterful rhythmic spring and a forthright, singing Sarabande that couldn't differ more from Hewitt's hushed deliberation. The zestful first Bourrée and its *da capo* equivalent bookend a slower, more neutral reading of the second Bourrée, while Ashkenazy's lilting embellishments help move the Gigue along nicely.

In the *Aria variata* Ashkenazy does not ornament the first variation to the extent of Hewitt or Christopher Hinterhuber. His lovely conversational repartee in Var 5 gives way to more neutral, blander tones in No 6. At the same time, Ashkenazy trumps his aforementioned colleagues for unabashed virtuosity in Var 2's right-hand triplets, a brisker, harder-hitting way with Var 3 and a fuller-bodied, more vocally oriented final variation. If the Marcello Oboe Concerto transcription's first movement is a tad square and stiff, the mesmerising note-to-note continuity of Ashkenazy's dulcet *Adagio* and his subtle cross-rhythmic accents in the finale compensate. By comparison, the *Italian Concerto* sounds homogenised and anonymous. All the notes are solidly in place, of course, yet the textural refinement of Hewitt and Rosalyn Tureck's carefully calibrated linear trajectory dig deeper. As deep as Ashkenazy's Marcello *Adagio*.
**Jed Distler**

*French Ov, Italian Conc – selected comparison:*
*Hewitt (3/01) (HYPE) CDA67306*
*Aria variata – selected comparison:*
*Hewitt (10/04) (HYPE) CDA67499*
*Hinterhuber (PALA) PMR0037*
*Italian Conc – selected comparison:*
*Tureck (VAI) VAIA1051 or VAIA1139*

## Beethoven · Arapov · Scriabin

**Arapov** Piano Sonata No 2[a]. Concerto for Piano, Violin and Percussion[b] **Beethoven** Piano Sonatas – No 7, Op 10 No 3[c]; No 27, Op 90[d]; No 32, Op 111[e] **Scriabin** Piano Sonata No 3, Op 23[f]
**Grigory Sokolov** *pf* with
[b]**Mikhail Vaiman** *vn* [b]**Nikolay Moskalenko** *perc*
[b]**Chamber Orchestra of the Leningrad State Philharmonic Society / Alexander Dmitriyev**
Melodiya Ⓜ ② MELCD100 2240 (130' • ADD)
Recorded [f]1972; [c]1974; [b]live, May 13, 1974; [a]1985; [d]live at the hall of the Leningrad Glinka State Academic Choir, May 6, 1987; [e]live at the Grand Hall of the Leningrad State Philharmonic Society, March 26, 1988




The microphone has been Sokolov's declared enemy for some while, in the

concert hall as well as the studio, so I suppose we must be grateful for what's offered here. There's nothing more recent than 1988; two of the Beethoven sonatas and the Arapov Concerto are taken from public concerts; and I guess some of the rest derives from broadcasts – almost certainly the Scriabin Sonata No 3, from 1972, which is wonderfully played but not immaculate down to the tiniest detail. It is also minus a precise start to its slow movement (disc 2, tr 3), which has been faded up as if no one would be likely to miss a dropped beat or two – we join the music somewhere in the first full bar. Whoever was responsible for this was evidently in the wrong job. No medals either to any of the other sound engineers. By far the best sound is heard in the Beethoven Sonata Op 10 No 3, dating from 1974, which fizzes with life and is clean as a whistle – a studio recording perhaps? These two items show us the already exceptional quality of Sokolov in his early twenties.

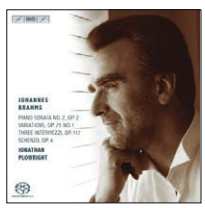
Scriabin's sonatas are on a par with (most of) Prokofiev's in my affections, and Sokolov in No 3, not often come by these days, is to the manner born and up there alongside Horowitz's version and Vladimir Sofronitsky's in his authority and natural feeling for getting the music off the page. As a Beethoven player, however, he gives me pause. Everything is pushed to extremes. You can hardly fail to get pleasure from the detailing of a master pianist who responds so generously to every moment. Absolutely no dead patches. The trouble is, with such heightened projection of every incident, the pulse gets dragged this way and that (sometimes rhythms too), and the bigger shapes, looming out of the mist, are only fitfully established. It is a go-stop manner and you get an assemblage of bits, often with no big experience. I except here the D major Sonata from Op 10, which is full of surprises and idiosyncrasies yet carries an authentic voice. And after doubts I accepted more readily Sokolov's vividness in the two-movement E minor Sonata, Op 90, having in mind Beethoven's reported descriptions of the first movement as a 'contest between head and heart' and of the lyrical rondo as 'a conversation with the beloved'. In the last Beethoven sonata, the great Op 111, I'm less sure of him. The turmoil of the first movement, its intensity sustained almost throughout, suits him well; but the *semplice* manner Beethoven asks for in the Arietta isn't attained or really attempted. At a full four minutes longer than two other versions I've been listening to lately, its vision of peace is surrendered to a rather tedious world-weariness.

Boris Arapov, a contemporary of Shostakovich, taught generations of students at the Leningrad Conservatoire, where he was director of the composition faculty from the mid-1970s until his death in 1992. He seems to have been revered as a teacher while obliged as a composer, I daresay, to live in Shostakovich's shadow. He wrote seven symphonies, stage music, some chamber works and five piano sonatas, of which No 2 is dedicated to Sokolov. It is just short of 10 minutes, playing continuously – out of Scriabin one could say. It promises more than it achieves. The Triple Concerto (1973) with chamber orchestra has a dedication to the memory of Stravinsky and is longer, in three movements; likewise, my hopes weren't delivered. Could its gesturing and rambling continuity have been more convincing?

**Stephen Plaistow**

## Brahms

'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 2'
Piano Sonata No 2, Op 2. Piano Pieces, Op 117. Variations on an Original Theme, Op 21 No 1. Scherzo, Op 4
**Jonathan Plowright** *pf*
BIS Ⓕ BIS2117 (76' • DDD/DSD)




Brahms's F sharp minor Sonata is at the heart of Jonathan Plowright's second volume of the composer's complete piano works. Written when Brahms was still a teenager, it experiments wildly with both form and technique. Already audacious and formidable, it brims over with thorny obstacles and it takes a master pianist of Plowright's stature to resolve its complication into lucidity. This he does with all of his customary command: in the opening volley of octaves, the more-than-strange transition passage in the *Scherzo* and, most of all, in the convoluted *Andante*, where his playing has an exceptional poise and translucency. The *Variations on an Original Theme*, too, are not without problems of cohesion even when these are resolved in a coda as rich and glowing as anything in Brahms.

But it is in late Brahms, in the three Op 117 Intermezzos, that Plowright shows himself a true and moving poet of the keyboard. In Nos 2 and 3 in particular he conjures an uncanny stillness. And if the early E flat minor Scherzo returns us to Brahms's hectic and storming manner, it could hardly be thrown off with a more magisterial authority. But the chief wonder of this disc remains Op 117, making one look ahead to Opp 116, 118 and 119, those bittersweet confidences of Brahms's final years. BIS's sound is impressive.

**Bryce Morrison**

## Brian Ⓡ

'The Complete Music for Piano'
Double Fugue. Four Miniatures. John Dowland's Fantasy. March from Turandot. Preludes and Fugues – D minor/major; C minor. Three Illuminations[a]
**Peter Hill** *pf* with [a]**Christopher Kay** *narr*
Cameo Ⓒ CC9016CD (59' • DDD)
From ● GOCLP9016D (5/82)




Although this is the second CD issue devoted to Havergal Brian's complete piano music, it was the first to be recorded, set down by Peter Hill in his first commercial recording in 1981. By the time Raymond Clarke's rival version appeared, 16 years later, Hill's had fallen out of the catalogue.

The first thing one notices is the difference in content: Hill's runs for just short of an hour, while Clarke's lasts 26 per cent longer. This is only partly due to Hill's accounts being generally quicker, especially in the C minor Fugue of 1924 where Clarke is 50 per cent longer. (In the D minor/major and the Double Fugue, only a handful of seconds separates their very similar readings.) Clarke included both versions of the *Three Illuminations* (1916), with and without speaker (Hill only includes the narrated version), as well as three of Brian's finest songs, two of which – bereft of their vocal parts – were recycled in the *Four Miniatures* (1918-20). Hill's inclusion of the March from the 1951 opera *Turandot* in the late Malcolm MacDonald and Ronald Stevenson's masterly transcription is invaluable in hinting at what late Brian piano music might have sounded like (the latest piece otherwise being the charming *John Dowland's Fancy* of 1934).

How do Hill's performances stand up 33 years on? He undeniably had a feeling for Brian's piano-writing and as interpretations they stand up well. Cameo's remastered sound allows all the detail to be heard but seems dull and constricted compared to the more natural recording afforded to Clarke. If forced to choose, Clarke's is the one to have. **Guy Rickards**

*Pf Wks – selected comparison:*
*Clarke (4/98) (DIVI) ATHCD12*

## Chopin

Four Ballades. Barcarolle, Op 60.
Prelude, Op 45. Scherzo No 4, Op 54
**Philippe Bianconi** *pf*
La Dolce Volta Ⓕ LDV14 (64' • DDD)




Philippe Bianconi has not enjoyed an exactly high-profile career since winning the silver medal at the Seventh Van Cliburn International Competition in 1985. In the extensive booklet (French, English, Japanese, German) attached to this handsomely produced release, the French pianist (*b*1960) speaks eloquently of his lifetime's attachment to the music he plays here.

I cannot recall another version of the Four Ballades in which every note is so clearly articulated or phrasing which lends such lucid narrative to the unfolding drama – try the final pages of the F minor Ballade, which usually fly by in a flurry. There is an unshowy integrity and honesty about Bianconi's interpretations that is entirely admirable. The downside is that by thus highlighting Chopin's contrapuntal ingenuity – no right-hand Chopiniste he – and adopting far slower tempi than the norm, Bianconi misses the propulsive drama of these tone-poems. In the G minor and F minor Ballades, for instance, both Cortot and Perahia agree on timings of 8'49" and 9'46" in their benchmark recordings, compared with Bianconi's 9'53" and 12'00" for the two works.

The enigmatic Prelude in C sharp minor, Op 45, was composed between the Second Ballade and the Third – which is where Bianconi places it in his programme, thoughtfully and sensitively played, like the Barcarolle which closes the disc. Preceding that is the Scherzo No 4 in which, like the Ballades, drama is sacrificed for textual clarity in a performance that fails to take flight. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Chopin

'Dedication'
Ballade No 4, Op 52. Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57. Fantaisie, Op 49. Two Nocturnes, Op 27. Scherzo No 3, Op 39
**Roger Peltzman** *pf*
Astre Ⓕ 1001 (55' • DDD)



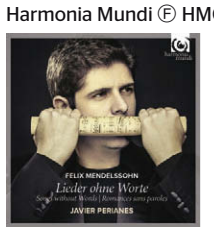

Entitled 'Dedication', Roger Peltzman's Chopin recital is made in memory of his uncle, the pianist and teacher Norbert Stern who, together with 26,000 Jews, was deported from Belgium to Auschwitz. And so it is somehow apt that all his performances are as musicianly and assured as they are clear-sighted. Remembering Chopin's love of Bach and Mozart, Peltzman emphasises the Classical side of Chopin's Romantic bias. Everything is given without exaggeration, without rushes of blood to the head. One thing is never stressed at the expense of another. For him the composer's voice always comes first.

In the startling and audacious C sharp Nocturne of Op 27, he has little to do with corpses washed ashore in a moonlit Venetian lagoon (James Huneker) and his coda to the Third Scherzo is the reverse of Martha Argerich's legendary firestorm. Such integrity is admirable even when there are elements of plain sailing (the opening pages of the F minor Fantaisie and the Fourth Ballade). In these more subdued moments, Peltzman is lucid at the expense of more characterful qualities (though his thunderous contrary-motion octaves in the Fantaisie find him letting go of his natural reserve). His sense of line and continuity are impeccable but he occasionally bypasses the finer points of Chopin's harmonic and rhythmic piquancy (a seeming paradox but one uniquely resolved in Rubinstein's urbane but inclusive playing).

And yet there is so much to admire in Peltzman's integrity. He is excellently recorded and his website includes a glowing testimony from the great Czech pianist Ivan Moravec. We are also told that 50 per cent of the revenue from this recording will go to the Holocaust Museum in Belgium. **Bryce Morrison**

## Mendelssohn

Songs Without Words: Op 19 – Nos 1 & 6; Op 30 No 6; Op 38 No 6; Op 53 – Nos 1 & 3; Op 62 No 5; Op 67 Nos 1-3 & 6; Op 85 No 4; Op 102 Nos 1, 4 & 6. Andante con variazioni, Op 82. Prelude and Fugue, Op 35 No 1. Rondo capriccioso, Op 14. Variations sérieuses, Op 54
**Javier Perianes** *pf*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC890 2195 (77' • DDD)




Perhaps more than most of Mendelssohn's output, the *Songs Without Words* have contributed to the saccharine image that history has passed down to us. There's no doubt that charm is in abundant supply in these pieces, but even in the finest hands, there can be a danger of aural toothache if listened to en masse.

Javier Perianes surmounts this risk completely: first, in the selection itself; second, by interspersing them with some of Mendelssohn's most brilliant piano pieces; and third, by the playing itself. There's nothing small-scale about his conception of this music and, where need be, climaxes are bold – in the Capriccioso section of the *Rondo capriccioso*, for instance, which also exhibits a fantastically puckish quality, or in the tragedy-laden Fugue, whose darkness is only finally salved by a consoling and majestic turn to the major in the closing bars.

He can charm without trying to, thanks to a haloed sound well caught by Harmonia Mundi's engineers, bringing a subtle range of colours to such a well-known number as the 'Venetian Gondolier Song' (Op 62 No 5), while the second of Op 67 gains in wistfulness from the way Perianes allows the phrases to hang in the air. By comparison, Chamayou is altogether more pert, Barenboim a degree or two slower and less spontaneous-sounding. And the Spaniard's flexibility also makes for a very telling *Variations sérieuses*. Chamayou's initial pace is a touch steadier, as if to emphasis the 'seriousness', but Perianes reveals that element as the piece progresses: you're very aware of how much Mendelssohn learnt from Beethoven – appropriately enough as this was originally intended as part of an album to raise money for a statue of Beethoven in Bonn. There's great clarity to Perianes's fugal textures and the work's fleeting moods are masterfully handled. While I wouldn't be without Perahia's ineffable performances of this repertoire, this new CD deserves a place alongside it. **Harriet Smith**

*Songs Without Words – selected comparison:*
*Barenboim (12/74R, 8/80R) (DG) 453 061-2GTA2*
*Songs Without Words, Rondo capriccioso, Variations sérieuses – selected comparisons:*
*Perahia (3/00) (SONY) SK66511*
*Chamayou (10/08) (NAIV) V5131*

## Mozart

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 2'
Piano Sonatas – No 3, K281; No 4, K282; No 5, K283; No 10, K330; No 13, K333
**Christian Blackshaw** *pf*
Wigmore Hall Live Ⓑ ② WHLIVE0069 (99' • DDD)
Recorded live, May 23, 2012




No angularities or vertically oriented sounds here. Instead, the capacity of the modern piano for a horizontally sustained line is largely to the fore, heard through

Christian Blackshaw's lucid touch, command of tone through dynamics and tactful use of pedal. His technique is unimpeachable, his concept of the music often gentle, sometimes contemplative, occasionally detached or assertive. Most of these attributes surface in the opening sonata, K281, its first-movement line sustained, phrases gracefully ordered. But the finale is episodic, its outbursts evened out; and the slow movement, rather fast for *andante*, is also far from *amoroso*.

Impersonality tells in other movements too – the Minuets of K282, the *Andante* of K283 and the first-movement *Allegro moderato* of K330 understated to the point of limpness. Yet Blackshaw responds with emotional fervour to the *Adagio* of K282, melancholy and inward, its structure strongly held together through both repeats. Reach the last work, K333, to hear him fully committed to a just interpretation.

Absent throughout is the sense of the demonic in Mozart, detected by Hermann Abert, whose rationale was published posthumously in Walter Cobbett's *Cyclopaedic Survey of Chamber Music* in 1929. Cobbett himself warned readers that Abert's concept would be daunting. But he has been vindicated by pianists such as Daniel-Ben Pienaar and Maria-João Pires, and the fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout. Their performances uncover a much wider range of subjective opportunities within this music that Blackshaw (and many others) have chosen not to consider.

**Nalen Anthoni**

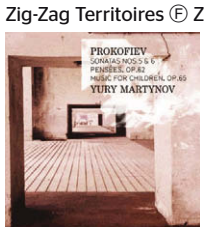
*Pf Sons – selected comparisons:*
*Pires (3/90[R], 2/92[R]) (DG) 477 5200GB6*
*Pienaar (2/11) (AVIE) AV2209*
*K330 – selected comparison:*
*Bezuidenhout (2/11) (HARM) HMU90 7498*

## Prokofiev

**Piano Sonatas – No 5, Op 38/135; No 6, Op 82. Trois Pensées, Op 62. Music for Children, Op 65**

**Yury Martynov** *pf*

Zig-Zag Territoires Ⓕ ZZT346 (71' • DDD)




Though the track list has it as Op 38, the Fifth Sonata should really be listed as Op 135, the number assigned by Prokofiev to the revised version of the work he made towards the end of his life and the version played here. Most of the changes are in the last movement, including a radically different final page to the original of 1925. Martynov invests its quasi-jazz second movement with a hushed, insinuating menace, very different from Katya Novitskaya (Melodiya, 1969), whose *staccato* left-hand chords are delivered with spiky aggression and little pedal.

Indeed, one gets the impression from this C major Sonata that Martynov is a Prokofiev-lite player, as confirmed by the Sixth Sonata, the last item on the disc. The tortured cries that open this great work and haunt its ending in Martynov's hands are merely the statement of an interesting first subject, over-pedalled, with everything smoothed out (and missing the jaunty off-beats in bars 24 et seq). His characterisation suits far better the Sonata's *Allegretto* movement (the return of its main theme is delightfully handled) and the third 'waltz' movement comes off well, though I think he must have small hands from the way he arpeggiates the left hand's tenths. In the finale, Martynov shows us he is no slouch technically but here, as throughout the sonata, he is surpassed in every respect by Richter (live in Prague in 1965) who, despite the pretty dire sound, has you on the edge of your seat in the coruscating final pages.

Of far less musical significance but much greater interest discographically are the

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two works placed between the sonatas: the rarely recorded *Pensées* (1934) and *Musique pour enfants (Douze pièces faciles)* from 1935 (the same year as *Peter and the Wolf*). Martynov here does us valuable service in providing beautiful, considered accounts of these brief encounters with the softer side of the composer – and all in first-rate sound. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk11; Kk17; Kk27; Kk29; Kk87; Kk96; Kk101; Kk109; Kk119; Kk135; Kk141; Kk146; Kk197; Kk209; Kk322; Kk380; Kk381; Kk492

**Igor Kamenz** *pf*

Naïve Ⓕ V5399 (69' • DDD)

## D Scarlatti

'Complete Keyboard Sonatas, Vol 15'

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk43; Kk72; Kk92; Kk177; Kk216; Kk220; Kk230; Kk233; Kk253; Kk265; Kk293; Kk296; Kk326; Kk365; Kk439; Kk448; Kk455; Kk552; Kk553

**Orion Weiss** *pf*

Naxos Ⓑ 8 573222 (79' • DDD)







In the main, Igor Kamenz's Scarlatti recital serves up unsatisfying interpretations of favourite pieces. Notice the purposeless elongations at phrase ends and inelegant trills in the opening D major Sonata (Kk96), in contrast to Vladimir Horowitz's crisp simplicity. The same holds true in Kk135: Kamenz's fussy inflections versus Dejan Lazić's brighter, sharper delivery. Antsy surges of pulse and dynamics render Kk381 dead on arrival when measured against Christian Zacharias's drive and vitality or the antipodal Maria Tipo's lapidarian mastery. Next to the astonishing specificity of Ivo Pogorelich's articulation in Kk119, Kamenz sounds workaday. A slow, spacy Kk197 has nothing of Horowitz's sense of line and shape, while Kamenz likewise lays heavily on almost every note of the B minor, Kk87. If you prefer the E major, Kk380, slow and introspective instead of medium-tempo and outgoing, David Greilsammer's finely honed detailing wipes the floor with Kamenz's prosaic pianism. The dancing heels of the F major (Kk17) click more heavily as the piece progresses, in contrast to the effortless grace of Solomon's classic shellac recording. Kamenz's spirited Kk141 surely will crack a smile, despite Argerich or Grosvenor lurking nearby ready to pounce with their jaw-dropping repeated notes. In short, for every sonata Kamenz offers, better recordings exist elsewhere.

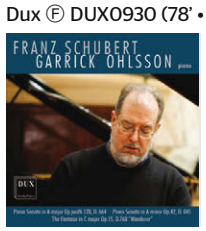
Orion Weiss's Scarlatti occupies a higher level of artistry altogether. You hear this right away in Kk552's deft contrapuntal interaction, Kk326's sunny-side-up, bird-like trills and Kk265's impeccably congruous embellishments and unison lines. Weiss's lyrical gifts also present themselves well in the E major (Kk216) and F major (Kk296), particularly in the latter's sublime harmonic detours – I only wish he had observed the repeats. Weiss's Kk455 and Kk448 may not match Yevgeny Sudbin's airy lightness, yet his clear fingerwork avoids the music's potential for registral entanglement. Similarly, the *legato* fluidity Weiss brings to the F minor Sonata, Kk365, justifies his sedate approach, although some may prefer Sergei Babyan's quicker pace and variegated touch. And Weiss's innate feeling for shaping long lines helps bind the persistent dotted rhythms of the long D minor (Kk92) into expressive sentences. This 15th volume in Naxos's ongoing Scarlatti cycle is one of the series' two or three finest. **Jed Distler**

## Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 13, D664; No 16, D845. Wandererfantasie, D760

**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf*

Dux Ⓕ DUX0930 (78' • DDD)




This recital is all about contrasts: at its centre, that most unpianistic of pieces – the *Wanderer Fantasy* – bookended by the outwardly untroubled A major Sonata, D664, and the highly ambiguous A minor, D845. Throughout there's the sense that Ohlsson believes this music can speak for itself. True, some find more to smile about in the opening of D664, though Ohlsson's understatedness in the *Andante* gives it a certain poise. The finale is spirited but in some passages the left hand seems too assertive, though this effect may be exacerbated by Dux's recording. Turn to Lupu, however, and you find something faster and less po-faced, the climaxes in his hands acquiring a playful quality.

The *Wanderer* rather suits Ohlsson's no-nonsense approach and he surmounts the work's more intransigent corners with ease. But listen to Lewis in the opening 'movement' and you find not only a greater sense of direction but also more in the way of light and shadow. The *Adagio* has an apt gravitas in Ohlsson's hands but, while he brings out the *Wanderer*'s relentless, somewhat obsessive side in the finale, I find myself more drawn to the oh-so-subtly inflected Lewis.

By this point, it's no surprise to find Ohlsson's D845 favours the vehement over the phantasmagorical. Lupu and Goode arguably find more of a balance between these two elements in the opening *Moderato*. But Pires has now entered the fray in this sonata and her way with the variation-form second movement is miraculous in its imagination and seeming effortlessness. Lupu, too, is a marvel here. And, in the finale, Pires, Lupu and Lewis all find an extraordinary variety of touch, compared to which Ohlsson sounds altogether more trenchant, not least in the chordal outbursts. **Harriet Smith**

*D664 & 845 – selected comparison:*

*Lupu (12/79R, 11/94R, 3/06) (DECC) 475 7074DC4*

*D845 – selected comparisons:*

*Pires (5/13) (DG) 477 8107GH*

*Goode (NONE) 7559 79271-2*

*Wandererfantasie, D845 – selected comparison:*

*Lewis (12/12) (HARM) HMC90 2136/7*

## Schumann

'Variationen & Fantasiestücke'

Abegg Variations, Op 1. Fantasiestücke – Op 12; Op 111. Geistervariationen

**Andreas Staier** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC90 2171 (60' • DDD)




Andreas Staier continues his exploration of Schumann in the company of a richly coloured, eloquent instrument by Erard, which dates from 1837, the same year as Schumann's Op 12 *Fantasiestücke*. Staier never does anything that is less than compelling – just think of his innovative take on the *Diabellis*, or 2013's *Gramophone* Award-winning Froberger and friends – and few musicians stride so effortlessly between eras and instruments. Where interpreter and keyboard particularly score is in the *Abegg Variations*, not least the left-hand crossings of the third variation, which have never sounded cheekier. And if the following *cantabile* is relatively steady, the final variation is a lot more nuanced than the pell-mell dash of some pianists.

This is a fascinating juxtaposition of early and late Schumann, the *Abegg* being his first published work, while at the other end of the spectrum comes the *Ghost Variations*, written at the time of his suicide attempt. Anderszewski and Uchida have done much to reverse received opinion about ▸

**GRAMOPHONE** *Reissue*

# JORGE BOLET

**Bryce Morrison** greets a 10-disc set gathering together the Cuban-American pianist's recordings for RCA and Columbia



Attracting attention: Jorge Bolet gets Sony's box-set treatment

Large-scale recorded tributes to iconic pianists can leave you at once exhausted and elated. Post-Horowitz, you are both shaken and stirred. The Argerich experience is akin to having an acetylene flare placed dangerously close to one's face. And now there is Sony's 10-CD release of Jorge Bolet's complete RCA and Columbia discs made largely when he was at the height of his extraordinary powers; an ultimate *grand seigneur* of the keyboard. Later, during his Decca years, his playing lost much of its former heat and edge, its freedom and power. An element of caution and a concern for 'correctness' replaced what was known in his adopted America as a 'blow your socks off' command, an arguably ironic and bitter reflection of so late a critical recognition. Speed may be the enemy of excitement (Bolet) but so can slow and overly reserved tempi.

Only one disc in the present offering contains those less than fully engaging qualities (the selection of Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes*). Yet even in the complete set there remains an oddly tame view of the A minor Etude's *Allegro vivace* and a jolting rather than gentle acceleration in the central *un poco più animato il tempo* of 'Paysage'. Bolet's dogged *Grand galop chromatique* is unquestionably grand but it seems an odd choice for a pianist so suspicious of obvious showmanship.

And here I should add that biographical details suggest and obtrude. Bolet's troubled personal life, hidden beneath an inscrutable mask, made him wary and evasive. A Clark Gable lookalike in his younger years, he attracted more unwelcome than welcome attention. Understandably, he suffered from mood-swings that could make him charming and affable one minute, gruff and remote the next. He was proud to tell you that while some of his students held their 'Papa Bolet' in affection, others were terrified. He could also tell you of a luckless cabaret pianist who approached him to say that he, too, was a pianist. The reply, accompanied by that formidable scowl ('well, I'm not Liberace') was 'no, I am a pianist, you are a piano player'.

But apart from such outwardly peripheral considerations, overall this collection is one of a unique and awe-inspiring glory, confirming Abbey Simon's view that no one had a bigger technique than Jorge, and Gilels's embrace: 'You are the only great pianist in America.' The later *Transcendental Etudes* are given in the grandest of grand manners. Hear him in 'Vision', 'Eroica', 'Harmonies du soir' and 'Chasse-neige' (that elemental prophecy of Impressionism) and it is impossible to overestimate such regality. In 'Bolet Rediscovered', his way with 'Un sospiro' is, again, pure Bolet, not for personal quirks or mannerisms but for a musical integrity and mastery the reverse of, say, Géza Anda's sophisticated alternative. 'Funérailles' (which Bolet played to a rapt Albert Hall audience in memory of Clifford Curzon, whose death was announced a few days earlier) is given with unswerving dignity and, in the central octave uproar, a thunderous virtuosity.

It is also interesting to note, most notably in a superb performance of the *Spanish Rhapsody*, a few discreet textual emendations (for which Bolet received a gratuitous wrap over the knuckles from Claudio Arrau.) What opulence, what grandeur, too, in the operatic paraphrases, where Liszt, never the pure altruist, reminded his public both of great music and of his own prodigious performances. Then there is superb Rachmaninov (the transcriptions), though pride of place surely goes to that legendary live 1974 Carnegie Hall recital. First there is the Bach-Busoni Chaconne (a very human challenge to Michelangeli's superb if chilly response). Chopin's Preludes could hardly be more masterly and evocative; but it is in the Wagner-Liszt *Tannhäuser* Overture that Bolet lifts his playing to a height undreamt of by even the finest pianists. In the Strauss-Tausig paraphrases, a potential for high camp is typically erased. In the *Nachtfalter* waltz, in particular, Bolet's daemonic strength makes an outward Viennese charm look ahead to Ravel's cataclysmic *La valse*. I should also add that there is a no less unremitting command in chamber music, in the characteristically chosen dark pages of Chausson's Concert for violin, piano and strings and in Franck's Piano Quintet. Here, while admirably sensitive to his Juilliard colleagues (together with Itzhak Perlman in the Chausson), he is so much more than *primus inter pares*.

All these performances emerge through the characteristic sound of Bolet's beloved Baldwin piano, its distinctive timbre and resonance as recognisable as, say, Horowitz's special Steinway. In conclusion it only remains for me to say that Bolet's grudging 'could be worse' estimate of his playing is both a comic and touching reminder of his modesty. And so it is heartening to know that more of Bolet's live performances are already in the pipeline. In the meantime you will rarely hear greater pianism, whether live or recorded. G

## THE RECORDINGS



**Various Cpsrs** 'The Complete RCA and Columbia Album Collection' **Bolet** RCA Ⓢ ⑩ 88843 01472-2

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Schumann's late music and these variations have an hypnotic quality to them but I find Staier a touch too interventionist, the line often sounding distinctly disjunct. I found this also in numbers such as the first of the Op 12, which could be more seamless; 'Warum?', from the same set, is also suffused with *rubato*. 'Grillen', on the other hand, is very effective, the piano's nutty lower register coming into its own.

The progress of the late *Fantasiestücke* is also at times slightly hampered by Staier's way with the accents, though the colours that emerge are unfailingly interesting and he moulds the second piece very lovingly. Though I may not necessarily respond with equal enthusiasm to all the pieces on this disc, Staier is unfailingly good at questioning received opinion and the results are thought-provoking. **Harriet Smith**

## Wanda Landowska

'The Complete Piano Recordings (1937-1958)'
**Haydn** Piano Sonatas – No 53, HobXVI/34; No 59, HobXVI/49.Sonata (Un piccolo divertimento: Variations), HobXVII/6 **Mozart** Piano Concerto No 26, 'Coronation', K537[a]. Piano Sonatas – No 4, K282; No 5, K283; No 9, K311; No 12, K332; No 18, K576. Fantasia, K397. Rondo, K511. Country Dances, K606 (arr Landowska)
**Wanda Landowska** *pf*
[a]**Chamber Orchestra / Walter Goehr**
APR Ⓢ ③ APR7305 (3h 53' • ADD)




APR's three-disc album of Wanda Landowska the pianist, rather than Landowska the iconic harpsichordist, throws down the gauntlet at present-day convention and received wisdom. Few musicians have exerted their will and personality more strongly, and the story of Landowska's courage and perseverance (told with zest and a wealth of information in Jed Distler's essay) will draw many up short. And if the character and audacity of virtually all these performances would be unthinkable from later generations, they would hopefully be among the first to admire an ethos and style so different from their own.

Landowska knew, too, that changing attitudes to scholarship and interpretation are the oxygen of creativity, so that while she could gently chide Casals ('You play Bach your way and I'll play him his way'), she was that rarest of musicians, an artist who could see beyond herself. Confronted by Glenn Gould's legendary 1955 recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, she exclaimed: 'I don't like it, but he's wonderful.' At the same time she was quick to defend her full and free embellishment of Mozart's melodic outlines, claiming that 'a literal devotion to the page would have been called ignorant and barbaric by Mozart's contemporaries'.

But turning from generality to so many examples of vivid and thought-provoking artistry, you are left to wonder at Landowska's way with Mozart's D minor Fantasia, her entirely personal eloquence. In the F major Sonata, K332, she is surprisingly pensive, while her performance of the D major Sonata, K576, is of a superfine brilliance. This appears in two recordings, the first incomplete, the second mercifully intact. And here, in particular, you are made aware of how few have achieved such an opening-out of Mozart's inclusiveness, of both his joy and pain.

Puritans may find Landowska quirky; and it is true that in the B flat Sonata, K333, she is more assertive than gracious, hardly allowing the listener his own space. But overall, Landowska's playing is a seemingly endless source of enlightenment. Mark Obert-Thorn's transfers are excellent, and these records should be heard by music college students in particular, to make them aware of other possibilities, of richer times and places. **Bryce Morrison**

## 'Fantasies'

**Brahms** Seven Pieces, Op 116 **Bruckner** Fantasie **Schumann** Fantasie, Op 17 **Zemlinsky** Fantasien über Gedichte von Richard Dehmel, Op 9
**Stanislav Khristenko** *pf*
Steinway & Sons Ⓕ STNS30032 (74' • DDD)




Stanislav Khristenko's first-place victory in the 2013 Cleveland International Piano Competition generated well-deserved online chatter, much of it directed to his wide-ranging portfolio of live performances posted on YouTube. His recital debut consists of Fantasies ranging from tiny jewel to epic canvas.

Beginning with a familiar epic canvas, Schumann's C major *Fantasie*, Khristenko organises the first movement's overflowing font of ideas and mercurial mood-swings into a fluid, flexible entity. Varied voice-leadings and discreet tempo adjustments keep the central movement's obsessive dotted rhythms alive and active, while few pianists have tossed off the coda's horrifically difficult skips with such playful lightness and effortless precision. If Khristenko's *rubato* in the lyrical finale arguably lacks the seasoned simplicity of Horowitz, Fiorentino or, among recent younger contenders, Andreas Haefliger, his gorgeous textural contouring conveys the impression that the leisurely arpeggiated left-hand writing and the long right-hand *cantabiles* emerge from separate instruments, dead-pianist style (and that's a compliment).

Bruckner's obscure three-minute *Fantasie* in G major consists of a modest chordal accompaniment supporting a single-note melody that quickly strays from the home key. Khristenko's is the best of this unassuming little gem's few commercial recordings. He milks the expressive possibilities of Zemlinsky's early Op 9 *Fantasien* to more subjective and probing effect than in Silke Avenhaus's relatively straighter Naxos traversal. Khristenko's sparse pedalling and linear cogency in the Brahms Op 116 Pieces convince more than his tendency towards slow tempi and overly stretched-out, self-conscious phrasing, save for the energetic and direct D minor closer. Succinct, informative booklet-notes and balanced, realistic engineering. **Jed Distler**

## 'La fauvette passerinette'

**J Anderson** Etude No 1 **G Benjamin** Fantasy on Iambic Rhythm **Dutilleux** D'ombre et de silence **Messiaen** Huit Préludes – No 1, La colombe. Pièce pour le tombeau de Paul Dukas. Quatre Etudes de rythme – No 1, Ile de feu I. Catalogue d'oiseaux – No 4, Le traquet stapazin. La fauvette passerinette. Morceau de lecture à vue **Murail** Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire...(in memoriam Olivier Messiaen) **Ravel** Miroirs – No 2, Oiseaux tristes **Sculthorpe** Night Pieces – No 5, Stars **Stockhausen** Klavierstücke – VII; VIII **Takemitsu** Rain Tree Sketch II **D Young** Dreamlandscapes, Book 2 – River
**Peter Hill** *pf*
Delphian Ⓕ DCD34141 (79' • DDD)




In 2012, 20 years after Messiaen's death, Peter Hill discovered among his sketches an 11-minute piece that might have marked the start of a second phase of work on the large-scale piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. In absorbingly detailed booklet-notes, Hill explains the innovative aspects of *La fauvette passerinette* (1961); and even if (as I suspect) Messiaen might have refined and increased the piece's contrasting materials in producing a definitive version, Hill's realisation forms a rewardingly substantial centrepiece to this outstanding recital disc.

The whole point is to put Messiaen himself in a stimulating context; and anyone suspecting from the playlist that

this collection of compositions is too much of a miscellaneous ragbag for its own good should be as disarmed as I was by the fresh perspectives it opens up. There is enough music by Messiaen himself to ensure that his presence and impact are never forgotten, not least because he is shown here to have steered French music virtually single-handedly from refined late Romanticism into the harsher world of late modernism. The other composers selected can then be heard responding to either or both of these compositional possibilities – and the explicit links between (for example) Ravel and Takemitsu show that this is far from a simple matter of chronology.

The appeal of the disc is greatly enhanced by the exceptional quality of the recording, with every facet of Hill's uncompromisingly extensive expressive range vividly captured – and, quite rightly, there is a credit for the piano technician. **Arnold Whittall**

## 'Invocation'

**JS Bach** Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639. Nun komm der Heiden Heiland, BWV659 (both arr Busoni). Cantata No 127 – Die Seele ruht in Jesu Händen (arr Bauer) **Liszt** Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S173 – No 3, Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude; No 5, Pater noster; No 7, Funérailles **Messiaen** Prelude No 6, 'Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu' **Murail** Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire...(in memoriam Olivier Messiaen) **Ravel** Miroirs – No 5, La vallée des cloches

**Herbert Schuch** *pf*

Naïve Ⓕ V5362 (68' • DDD)




This thoughtfully themed recital testifies to the wide terms of reference that the Romanian-born pianist Herbert Schuch has at his disposal in choosing his repertoire. The central idea of the disc is that it 'designates the points of contact between man and God: glorification and prayer, supplication, but also sorrow and death'. The impact of bells is significant. 'The sound of bells for me,' Schuch says, 'is the magical medium by means of which we try to communicate with God.' Schuch could well have selected pieces that lay their tintinnabular credentials out on a clangorous canvas but instead he has chosen ones of a reflective disposition.

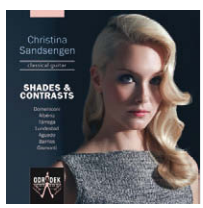
There is nothing ostentatious. Even the Liszt pieces – 'Pater noster', 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude' and 'Funérailles' – catch the composer in self-communing mood, with Messiaen's early *Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu* setting itself far apart from the jubilant sonorities and rhythms he would explore in some later works. This by no means implies a paucity of variety here. The recital is sensitively buttressed by three Bach transcriptions, and, in addition to the Liszt and Messiaen, there is further stylistic scope in Ravel's 'La vallée des cloches' and in *Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire* that Tristan Murail wrote in Messiaen's memory. Schuch's mastery of colour and of summoning up the composers' creative individuality shines different lights on his invocatory stimulus, and the entire recital is much more than the sum of its parts. **Geoffrey Norris**

## 'Shades & Contrasts'

**Aguado** Andante and Rondo, Op 2 No 3 **Albéniz** Mallorca, Op 202. Suite española, Op 47 – Asturias **Anonymous** Spanish Romance **Barrios** La Catedral **Domeniconi** Koyunbaba Suite, Op 19 **Gismonti** Agua e vinho **Lundestad** Late at Night **Tárrega** Lágrima

**Christina Sandsengen** *gtr*

Odradek Ⓕ ODRCD326 (59' • DDD)




There's no getting around it: Christina Sandsengen is pretty easy on the eye. But the playing on this entry-level recital, ideal for classical guitar newbies, is impressive enough to sway even the most sceptical classical guitar aficionados. The first thing that strikes you about Sandsengen's interpretations is that they are pianistically conceived: each tone is very much a sharply discreet entity and yet fused to the totality through a masterly sense of tonal and rhythmic hierarchy, and it's no surprise the piano was her main instrument until she took up the guitar at 15.

The recital opens with a terrific account of Domeniconi's *Koyunbaba*, like the majority of the works here one of the most popular in the repertoire; it closes with Gismonti's haunting *Agua e vinho*, which connects as easily with Sven Lundestad's nocturnal, jazzy *Late at Night* as *Koyunbaba* does with Barrios's sweetly pious *La Catedral*. In between these more recent works lies the programme's Romantic core, of which Albéniz's *Mallorca* and Dionisio Aguado's Rossinian Andante and Rondo are perhaps the most successful. For if, in the former, she presses the melody against the underlying harmonies to produce an exquisite brocade effect, in the latter she lets her hair down, the Andante's mock pomposity leading to a salon-lite Rondo of tremendous fun.

And yet Sandsengen's best playing – by turns emphatic, fragile, bold, tender and wild – can be heard right at the beginning, in *Koyunbaba*. It's no mean feat to force you to reappraise such a well-known work. Sandsengen pulls it off. **William Yeoman**

## 'Treasures of the Empfindsamkeit'

**CPE Bach** Fantasia, 'Freye Fantasie', Wq67. Keyboard Sonata, Wq52/6. La Stahl, Wq117/25. L'Aly Rupalich, Wq117/27 **Haydn** Piano Sonata No 33, HobXVI/20 **Mozart** Adagio, K540 **Muthel** Arioso and 12 Variations No 2

**Carole Cerasi** *clav*

Metronome Ⓕ METCD1091 (71' • DDD)




All too often the extraneous noises involved in both the operation and the recording of a clavichord can be louder than the instrument itself. On this disc, the Haydn C minor Sonata finale's bravura right-hand runs sound as if they're being accompanied by chopsticks. But if you can get past these considerations, you'll be rewarded by Carole Cerasi's impressive musicality and technical control of a Hoffmann clavichord from 1784, housed at Hatchlands Park, and heard for the first time here on a commercial release.

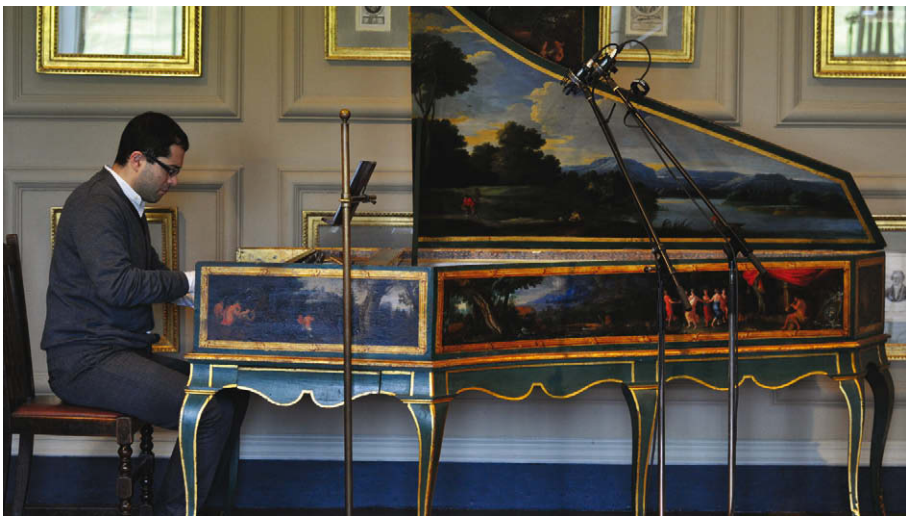
Listeners familiar with Cerasi's 1998 CPE Bach recording on harpsichord and fortepiano (7/00) will find her clavichord interpretations of this composer equally lively and brash. *L'Aly Rupalich*'s rapid dynamic alterations really rock out here, and so do the left-hand broken octave ostinatos: Billy Joel, take note! All 12 minutes of the *Freye Fantasie* teem with drama, from the stark and intense slow sections to the wildly dispatched toccata-like passages. Cerasi plays all three movements of the E minor Sonata sensationally, exploiting the instrument's twangy sonorities at full-tilt.

In Muthel's Arioso and Variations, Cerasi's agogic stresses and carefully considered accents intensify embellishments and key isolated single notes in the bass without sounding the least mannered. Although the sustaining power of a fortepiano or concert grand better suits the operatic qualities of Mozart's B minor Adagio, modern pianists can learn plenty from Cerasi's shaping of long *crescendos* and *diminuendos*, or her judging of silences for maximum effect – qualities that also distinguish the Haydn C minor Sonata. To quote Virgil Thomson approving a friend's cuisine: 'This is no kids' stuff!' **Jed Distler**

**GRAMOPHONE** *Collector*

# RAMEAU'S PIÈCES DE CLAVECIN

**Julie Anne Sadie** listens to a selection of recordings of Rameau's works for keyboard in both solo and ensemble performances



Mahan Esfahani at the Cobbe Collection's Ruckers-Hemsch harpsichord

Some of the finest harpsichordists of our day have celebrated Rameau's 250th anniversary with versions of his highly regarded if relatively little-known solo and concerted harpsichord works: highly innovative music for supremely accomplished practitioners. Among the recordings is something for nearly everyone, including those who prefer a Steinway to a Ruckers.

The choices of instrument and recorded sound quality produce the most immediate impressions. Esfahani and Haas play Ruckers in 18th-century states; Haas also uses a 1707 Dumont for the later books. Bruno Procopio plays a Ruckers copy, Ketil Haugsand a two-manual instrument he built himself; Julien Wolfs (Les Timbres) plays a 1751 Hemsch associated with Rameau's patron, La Pouplinière. Thérèse Dussaut opted mainly for Steinways in her reissued recordings from the 1970s and early '80s. Esfahani, Procopio and Dussaut favour a softer-edged, intimate recorded sound (you hear the gentle clatter of the Cobbe Collection's Ruckers/Hemsch), while Haas and Hausgand prefer a brighter one. The extent to which the harpsichordists exploit the potential of their instruments is equally striking: among the soloists, Esfahani, Haas and Procopio make frequent and imaginative changes of manual, stops and coupling; Haugsand is relatively sparing.

**Thérèse Dussaut**'s highly controlled approach to the piano is little short of emasculating, both to the instrument and the music. Hers is the sound of a gilded music box, skewed to highlight the themes and almost completely devoid of resonance in the lower register; her added application of *diminuendo* is also indefensible. If her affection for Rameau's music and the technique required to perform it are not in doubt, the relevance today of these recordings can be questioned.

However, a key factor in determining the longevity of an interpretation is the degree to which the performer succeeds in characterising the music and, on this point alone, top marks must go to **Mahan Esfahani**, who seems always to have its measure and brings unfailing wit, affection, fluency and pacing to his interpretations. The others share many of these qualities, but not all. **Arthur Haas** thinks on a microcosmic scale: everything is consciously worked out and beautifully crafted but rarely spontaneous; his penchant for shaping every line with *inégalité* often works against the insouciance he may be trying to project. **Ketil Haugsand**'s interpretations seem sombre; and because he too often chooses to linger on the first of a group of notes belonging to a beat or motif, he reduces its effect to cliché. Specific examples abound of the stylistic differences between these performances but nowhere more decisively than in the pieces of Rameau's third book.

There is much of interest, too, in the two latest recordings of Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741). This is uniquely constructed music for ensembles of soloists and both groups acquit themselves well. The bass viol part is exceptionally demanding, so Myriam Rignol plays an instrument fitted with an extra (8th) high G string (a copy of a mid-18th-century French instrument), the more easily to traverse Rameau's frequent leaps between treble and bass. **Les Timbres** is a trio of flute, bass viol and harpsichord – one of the most delicate and refined of Baroque textures and one of Rameau's preferred combinations for this collection. They play with charm but not always panache, allowing tempi occasionally to falter. Recognising that some movements and even sections suit the violin more than the flute and vice versa, **Bruno Procopio** and his colleagues have developed semi-orchestrated performances more varied and colourful than usual. Most importantly, their performances are richly characterised and reliably paced.

Of all the harpsichordists reviewed here, only Haugsand chose to record Rameau's arrangements for solo harpsichord included in the 1741 collection (he made a fine recording of the concerted version with Catherine Mackintosh and Laurence Dreyfus in 1992). Esfahani considers the harpsichord arrangements to be 'rather clunky nods to the publishing market' and to my mind none approaches the finesse of the earlier *Pièces de clavecin*.

Having just won a *Gramophone* Award for his superlative CPE Bach recording, Esfahani has surely trumped it with Rameau's solo harpsichord works. G

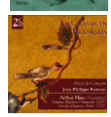
## THE RECORDINGS



**Rameau** Pf Wks
**Thérèse Dussaut**
Solstice Ⓢ ③ SOCD297/9



**Rameau** Cpte Pièces de clavecin G
**Mahan Esfahani**
Hyperion Ⓕ ② CDA68071/2



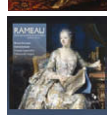
**Rameau** Pièces de clavecin
**Arthur Haas**
Plectra Ⓜ ② PL21301



**Rameau** Pièces de clavecin
**Ketil Haugsand**
Simax Ⓜ ② PSC1345



**Rameau** Pièces de clavecin
en concerts **Les Timbres**
Flora Ⓕ FLO3113



**Rameau** Pièces de clavecin
en concerts **Bruno Procopio et al**
Paraty Ⓕ PARATY412201

PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON PERRY

# GRAMOPHONE *Reissues*

## CLASSICAL STYLE AND MORE...

**Harriet Smith** on two box-sets from Sony Classical celebrating a couple of connoisseurs' pianists, Charles Rosen and Nelson Freire

**Charles Rosen** – as anyone who ever met him, heard him or read him – was a man who did things his own way. Who else would have recorded such outlandishly out-of-fashion composers as Moriz Rosenthal and Leopold Godowsky in 1965 (under the subheading 'Electrifying Performances of the World's Most Difficult Piano Showpieces')? Today those readings are still impressive, if not as technically staggering as from the likes of Marc-André Hamelin. But what this box of Rosen's complete Columbia (CBS) and Epic discs above all demonstrates is his range and his refusal to be pigeonholed.



Nelson Freire's Columbia legacy hails from the late 1960s and 1970s

Rosen was an ardent Francophile (with a PhD in French literature) and clarity is uppermost in his interpretations of French repertoire. This works best in the Debussy *Etudes* (though, *pace* Jeremy Siepmann in his otherwise brilliant essay, Rosen was not the first to record the set – that palm goes to Adolph Hallis back in 1938). But in *Images* I wanted a greater luxuriance of sound, while Rosen's Granadan *Estampe* lacks sultriness. In *Gaspard* detail takes precedence over effect, 'Le gibet' losing out on inexorability, but 'Scarbo' leaps into life in the most mesmerising fashion.

His late Beethoven, though, is masterly, combining humanity and absolute understanding of what makes Beethoven tick. There are two versions of Opp 106 and 110 (Epic, 1964; CBS, 1970). The earlier reading of the *Hammerklavier* is more thrillingly hot-blooded, rawly elemental and more secure in its virtuosity. Other highlights are many: scintillating readings of Webern (especially the songs with Heather Harper); tenderness in Schoenberg's Piano Pieces, Op 33, and a superbly playful Op 25 Suite; a pungently purposeful reading of Stravinsky's *Movements*, conducted by the composer; and modern-sounding Haydn sonatas. And then there's Elliott Carter, of whose music Rosen was such an ardent champion. Two recordings of the delightful Double Concerto are included, the first when the ink was barely dry, with the ever-game Ralph Kirkpatrick, coupled with Leon Kirchner's glisteningly textured Chamber Concerto and Carter's Tippettian Piano Sonata (1945-46); while for the second for CBS Paul Jacobs provides a jazzy reading of the harpsichord part, Rosen as reactive as ever. I can't pretend to be a fan of Boulez's piano sonatas, even in these highly intelligent readings of the First and Third. Bach, however, is a different matter. The box includes one of the most unaffectedly profound *Goldbergs* ever committed to disc. This is true of his *Art of Fugue* too: Rosen could unpick a fugue as naturally as he could rustle up a cordon bleu meal or converse on French Romantic painting. A true box of delights and a fitting tribute to one of the greatest musical minds of the past century.

When CBS took on the young Brazilian **Nelson Freire**, he was promoted as a Young Turk, fresh from a swathe of competition successes, and it set about promoting him in virtuoso Romantic repertoire, while styling him in an array of questionable knitwear. He was only 22 when he made his first recording for the company in 1967 but his Brahms Third Sonata has all the power you could wish, combined with a mature nobility and unerring pacing. His wonderfully open-hearted Schumann *Carnaval* contrasts strikingly with Rosen, the American more extreme, if oddly slow in the final March. Freire's 1969 Chopin B minor Sonata dares to dream and is suffused with subtly lit inner voicings as well as abundant virtuosity. The 1970 Preludes, too, are scintillating in their changeability. His Liszt is just as magnificent: the Sonata has a grandeur and, where needed, blazing virtuosity, plus a great sensitivity towards the piece's more musing moments; while his 1968 recording of *Totentanz* with the Munich Philharmonic and Rudolf Kempe has brimstone in plentiful supply without ever resorting to pianistic garishness. The same forces tend towards the prosaic in the other concertos – particularly afflicted is the Tchaikovsky First (even the first phrase is wobbly), though the forwardly placed Freire still manages to produce a reading of great majesty. Among the finest performances included is Schubert's first set of Impromptus, full of incident yet, as always with this artist, direct and unaffected. The highlights are many in this 70th-birthday tribute, rounded out by Jed Distler's touching profile of this most modest of pianistic lions. G

## THE RECORDINGS




**Charles Rosen** 'The Complete Columbia and Epic Album Collection'
Sony Classical Ⓢ (21 discs) 88843 01476-2




**Nelson Freire** 'The Complete Columbia Album Collection'
Sony Classical Ⓢ ⑦ 88875 00228-2

PHOTOGRAPHY: DON HUNSTEIN/SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

# Gerald Barry

The angular, brazen and fiercely individual music of this true Irishman undergoes colourful analysis by **Paul Griffiths**

In moments of exhilaration one may find one's mouth falling open, not knowing whether to laugh or scream. So it could be when listening to the music of Gerald Barry. There are holes in the harmony, and though the line keeps on going, it jumps and kicks and jolts through constantly changing patterns, sometimes picking up more or less familiar tunes and throwing them away again, while the overall sound may be of instruments lashed together against their natural inclinations, or pushed into tight corners registrally, or exposed – to their own and everyone's embarrassment. Barry's music is at once highly formal and iconoclastic, perky and suave, sensuous and brittle. Wit and intensive persistence are key features – wit, but not the elegant ironies of former times, which have hotted up and taken a twist. This is Stravinsky squared, cubism cubed.

'Why so wild?' one might be tempted to ask, while certainly not wishing it otherwise. Perhaps there is some explanation in Barry's origins – in the west of Ireland, which, musically speaking, is close to nowhere. Ireland has produced great numbers of writers, fighters and saints, but not so many composers. There's a proto-Romantic pianist (John Field), a theatre man (Michael Balfe) and a late Romantic (Charles Villiers Stanford), all of whom left Ireland when young

*'In its sound and manner, in its refined unrefinement, the piece is fully Barryesque – at once plain and peculiar'*

to find their opportunities elsewhere – these miscreants do not offer much of a tradition, certainly not for a composer with a strong sense of the past, a composer whose output includes more than one explicit if precarious homage to Beethoven, as well as a work entitled *The Ring* (for choir, wind band and bells) and two operas whose heads are spinning with Handel.

Barry's student years coincided pretty much with the 1970s, when not only minimalism was fresh and energetic but also older music, as it started to take on new life in the hands of performers striving for period style. The young Barry took it all in. After studying at University College Dublin, he followed the usual Irish route – out. For almost 10 years he was on a grand tour of continental cities, continuing his education along the way with Peter Schat, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Friedrich Cerha and, for the longest period, Mauricio Kagel, another tricky outsider. But then, unlike his compatriot predecessors, he returned to Dublin, and soon his music was making a mark, both there and in London.

Among the works that first brought him attention, the enigmatically titled '_____' (1979) is immediately characteristic: a snakes-and-ladders board of scales ominously rising only to start again at other levels, music at once plain and peculiar, always doubled – shadowed – by an ensemble of clarinets, strings and keyboards (harpsichord doubling piano). There is a nod to – or perhaps more a glare at – the past in the fact that one starting point, according to the composer, 'was the idea of capturing and freezing the scales used as flourishes in Tchaikovsky's symphonies'. In its sound and manner, however, in its refined unrefinement, the piece is fully Barryesque.



Gerald Barry's music is bewilderingly diverse and fiercely individual

Its composer spent most of the next decade nested back in Dublin working on his first opera, *The Intelligence Park*, set in the city in 1753, at the time of a musical glory that was not to be sustained. (This was close to the time that Handel's *Messiah* was brought to birth there.) With a libretto by Vincent Deane that supplied the composer with ideal material – sophisticated and curt, fancy-filled and rudely direct, deep with ambiguity – the opera considers issues of power and impotence, sexual, social and creative, its principal characters being a composer, his male lover, a castrato singer and a young woman, who, the object of others' desires and designs,



PHOTOGRAPHY: NIGEL LUCKHURST/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS

## BARRY FACTS

**Born** Clarehill, Clarecastle, Co Clare, Ireland, April 28, 1952
**Education** University College Dublin (1969-73), then studied in Amsterdam, Cologne, Vienna
**Career** Lecturer at University College Cork (1982-86), subsequently freelance composer
**Key moments** First important performance: *Things that Gain by Being Painted*, Trinity College Dublin, 1978; premiere of first opera: *The Intelligence Park*, London, 1990; featured composer at Aldeburgh and Huddersfield (2002); 2006: beginning of association with Los Angeles Philharmonic; 2013: received 2012 RPS Music Award (category: Large-Scale Composition) for *The Importance of Being Earnest*

has some of her own. Flashes from the imaginary composer's opera are included in a score which, with elegant coarseness and bizarre cool, splices together mid-18th-century and modern musical worlds.

While working on *The Intelligence Park*, for which he had neither commission nor obvious prospect of performance, Barry produced a few other things, including *Triorchic Blues*, a tussle of typically angular rhythmic forces originally enshrined in the piano (1990), with versions later following for other instruments. (Triorchidism might have given some basis for Casanova's gossip that Giusto Tenducci, sometimes called 'Il Senesino', a castrato who not only visited Dublin but married there, and whom Barry and Deane took as the model for their castrato, Serafino, succeeded in fathering two children.) After the first performance of *The Intelligence Park*, at the Almeida Theatre in north London in 1990, came a pepped-up creativity that quickly brought a second opera, again with Handelian echoes: *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit* (1991-2), written for Channel 4 TV.

The ironies of being an Irish artist promoted in the former imperial capital by no means escaped this alert composer. To a commission from the BBC for the 1988 Proms he composed *Chevaux-de-frise*, a fearsome orchestral barrage of noisy dissonances going at a quick march or jogtrot, in emulation of the eponymous spiked barriers formerly used on battlefields. Another BBC commission resulted in *The Conquest of Ireland* (1995) for baritone and orchestra, to a text by the composer's namesake, the medieval Welsh writer Gerald de Barry (Giraldus Cambrensis), and for the 15th anniversary of the Royal Festival Hall he came up with a brazen recasting of the national anthem, *God Save the Queen* (2001).

Following almost a decade largely filled with orchestral and chamber music, he returned to opera to set a play (also filmed) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, about a passionate woman in midlife and her failing, stunted or unpursued relationships with her younger lover, her daughter and her secretary. The all-female cast is buffeted by a wind-heavy orchestra whose harmony is as negligent as the society in which these women have to live. Asked about that aspect of his music for the work, Barry answered: 'I would say every single bar in this opera can be related to a key centre.' However: 'Sometimes I had to agonise a lot to find out what the centre actually was.' His characters live in a musical world whose tonality is cracked, besmirched, degraded, ambiguous – a world open to the expression of uncertainty and irresolution. The premiere was a concert performance in Dublin in 2005, followed soon after by a staging by English National Opera.

Since then Barry has been working on operas almost continuously, beginning with *La plus forte* (2007), setting a monodrama by August Strindberg for Barbara Hannigan, who had sung the daughter in the London production of *The Bitter Tears*. Hannigan was also his chosen Cecily for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which, again, had its premiere in a concert performance (Los Angeles, 2011), and has since been staged in Nancy and London. Next will be an opera drawn from Lewis Carroll's Alice books. Meanwhile, other genres have not been neglected, recent works including a full-scale Piano Concerto (2012) as well as an array of smaller vocal and chamber pieces.

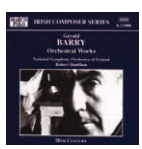
It is a bewilderingly diverse output, and fiercely individual, perhaps not least in its aim. Asked by the bachtrack.com last year what he wanted listeners to take away from his music, Barry answered in one word: 'Joy.' G

## BARRY DISC SELECTION

Showcasing diversity in both small- and large-scale works



**'_____'. Piano Quartet No 1. Triorchic Blues and other small-scale pieces**
Noriko Kawai *pf* Nua Nós / Dáirine Ní Mheadhra
NMC Ⓕ NMCD022 (4/95)
These little pieces from roughly the time of *The Intelligence Park* are full of fun and games, with the bonus of booklet-notes by the opera's librettist, Vincent Deane.



**Of Queens' Gardens. Chevaux-de-frise and other orchestral pieces**
National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland / Robert Houlihan
Marco Polo Ⓕ 8 225006 (4/98)
Some of *The Intelligence Park* is here in *Of Queens' Gardens*, and *Chevaux-de-frise* is a classic, plus the disc includes a couple of delightful ballet moments.



**The Importance of Being Earnest**
*Soloists incl* Barbara Hannigan *sop* Peter Tantsits *ten*
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group / Thomas Adès
NMC Ⓕ NMCD197 (10/14)
Wilde's comedy happily seizes a whole other level of wonder, wit and strangeness. An alternative to this disc would be *The Intelligence Park* (NMCD122).

# Vocal



David Patrick Stearns on the latest Szymanowski from Chandos:
*'The choral/orchestral forces benefit from Gardner's unindulgent but still atmospheric balancing of elements'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 91



Alexandra Coghlan reviews a new exploration of Baltic Baroquery:
*'Cantatas bustle with melody and colour, enlivening Lutheran restraint with cheeky gestures'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 97

## Berg · Zemlinsky

'Lieder'
**Berg** Sieben frühe Lieder (arr de Leeuw) **Busoni** Berceuse élégiaque, Op 42 (arr Schoenberg) **Webern** Passacaglia, Op 1 (arr de Leeuw) **Zemlinsky** Six Songs to Poems by Maurice Maeterlinck, Op 13
**Katrien Baerts** *sop*
**Het Collectief / Reinbert de Leeuw**
Zig-Zag Territoires Ⓕ ZZT345 (51' • DDD)

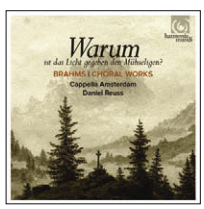



The short-lived Society for Private Musical Performances, founded by Schoenberg and his pupils, is the inspiration for this unusual disc. Restricted by their limited funds, the Society's concerts regularly offered full-scale works in modest arrangements. As a result, reductions exist of a fair number of pieces by Second Viennese School composers for small, flexible ensembles, and it is in that spirit that Reinbert de Leeuw has conceived this programme. Old or new, the arrangements mostly employ nine or ten instruments and crucially include the distinctive sounds of harmonium and piano.

This is a world of shimmering beauty, reflected in glowing colours. Busoni's dreamy *Berceuse élégiaque*, in an arrangement by Schoenberg, sets the tone. Then two sets of songs – Berg's *Seven Early Songs* and Zemlinsky's little-heard *Six Songs after Maeterlinck* – are sung with light, lyrical warmth by soprano Katrien Baerts. De Leeuw's arrangements of the Berg engage the most suggestive of colours, subtly underpinned by the harmonium (there is little of the post-Wagnerian lushness found in Berg's own version for full orchestra). Various hands were involved in the arrangements of the Zemlinsky songs, which range from a dark, fairy-tale ambience to *Pelléas*-like, barely suppressed passion. The disc ends with Webern's Op 1 Passacaglia, arranged again by de Leeuw and played on a surprisingly large scale by the fine musicians of Het Collectief. Only just over 50 minutes' playing time, but this is a disc where size is pointedly not the issue. **Richard Fairman**

## Brahms

Warum ist das Licht gegeben, Op 74 No 1. Fünf Gesänge, Op 104. Schicksalslied, Op 54[a]. Drei Motettn, Op 110. Drei Quartette. Fest- und Gedenkspruche, Op 109. Intermezzo, Op 119 No 1[a]
**Cappella Amsterdam / Daniel Reuss** with **Philip Mayers,** [a]**Angela Gassenhuber** *pf*
Harmonia Mundi Ⓕ HMC90 2160 (70' • DDD • T/t)




From the three sets of unaccompanied motets Brahms composed at various times, only one from the second set (Op 74) and the complete final set (Op 110) are included on this disc, revealing an intriguing juxtaposing of stylistic influences. Bach is very much in evidence in the four-section *Warum ist das Licht*, while Brahms's study of the Renaissance polyphonists strongly flavours the shorter Op 110 motets, and all are infused with the lush harmonic vocabulary of late-19th-century Germany. Cappella Amsterdam perform these works with immaculate poise and a wonderfully rich breadth of tone, magically captured by this warmly atmospheric recording. Daniel Reuss induces a sumptuous sound from his singers, no question about it, but whether he more than dips an interpretative toe into the complexities of Brahms's sacred motets is open to question.

Certainly the secular works on this disc come across with far more conviction. The choral sound is never anything but immensely beautiful; but, wonderful as the unaccompanied singing is, the intense beauty of the *Song of Destiny* is, if anything, enhanced by the gorgeously moulded accompaniment from the piano partnership of Philip Mayers and Angela Gassenhuber.

The latter pianist crops up again in a delicate and discreet account of one of the solo piano Intermezzos which makes a surprising bridge between the Bach-like chorale which closes the Op 74 motet and the first of the Op 104 songs. This might have seemed more of an incongruity than it actually is, were it not for the thick layers of aural lacquer coated over the whole programme. As it is we slide seamlessly from piece to piece, rarely disturbed enough to ask quite what this strangely mixed bag of a programme is trying to tell us. **Marc Rochester**

## Brumel

Missa de Beata Virgine. Ave caelorum domina. Beata es, Maria. Lauda Sion salvatorem. Nato canunt omnia
**The Brabant Ensemble / Stephen Rice**
Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68065 (64' • DDD • T/t)




The precise date of Antoine Brumel's death is not known but its 500th anniversary may well have fallen about the time The Brabant Ensemble made this recording last year. Its centrepiece is his *Mass for the Blessed Virgin*, which a slightly later theorist reported having been written in a spirit of friendly competition with Josquin. In this story Brumel came up short – but he was bound to do so, such was the later 16th century's cult of his rival. In fact it is one of Brumel's finest works, in which his tendency to note-spinning is kept in check (as it is in the rest of the music chosen for this recording). The Brabants negotiate it briskly, and though one might envisage a more lyrical, expansive approach (as has often been adopted for Josquin's setting), their incisive reading communicates something of the essential difference between the two settings, redressing the balance in Brumel's favour. (The only other available recording for Naxos is hereby superseded.)

The disc is completed with a selection of Brumel's motets, among which particular mention goes to the expansive Christmas

piece *Nato canunt omnia*, with its echoes of Johannes Regis in the previous generation. It receives a bright, lithe performance whose translucent tone nearly conceals impressive vocal dexterity. In marked contrast to it is the tranquil *Beata es, Maria*, which may incidentally have formed part of another musical competition (settings by Compere and Obrecht are very similar in design). The Brabants have never ventured this early before but on this showing I hope very much that they will do so again.

**Fabrice Fitch**

*Missa de Beata Virgine – selected comparison:*
*Speculum Ens (NAXO) 8 570535*

## Fauré

Requiem, Op 48. Pavane, Op 50.
Eight Songs (orch Lubbock)
**Ilona Domnich** *sop* **Johnny Herford** *bar*
**OSJ Voices; Orchestra of St John's / John Lubbock**
Orchestra of St John's Ⓕ OSJCD01 (69' • DDD)
Recorded live at St John's Smith Square, London, April 24, 2013




Unsurprisingly, their website includes generous words of praise about the first release on the Orchestra of St John's own label. Sadly, I find it disappointing.

The programme, recorded during a single live performance in April 2013, is enticing enough, and I am particularly taken by John Lubbock's exquisite orchestrations of a clutch of Fauré's solo songs. Alternating the solo voice between the clear and light baritone of Johnny Herford and the rather more fulsome soprano of Ilona Domnich works well. If Herford understates Fauré's delicate writing for the voice, Domnich gives it a more Wagnerian breadth, most obviously in 'Fleur jetée', where her fervently dramatic delivery seems at odds with Lubbock's chamber-like string accompaniment.

I, for one, can never have too many Fauré Requiems on disc, especially when, as here, the performance is so deliciously restrained. There are undoubtedly some truly ravishing moments; just before Herford's solo entry in the *Offertoire* – 4'15" – comes a piece of orchestral playing so sublime I find myself playing it repeatedly in isolation. But exquisite as individual moments are, taken overall I suspect this was a performance more impressive heard live than in the cold glare of CD. Lubbock's is a careful and seamless reading, and he balances the orchestral textures superbly, but it is rather weighed down by choral singing which, perhaps, is not as polished as it might be. Evidence of uneasy blend within various voice parts is also apparent in the *Pavane*.

My biggest disappointment is with the sound quality which, while faithful to the close and intimate acoustic of St John's Smith Square, feels too stifling to allow this committed music-making to be shown at best advantage. **Marc Rochester**

## Handel

Messiah, HWV56
**Lucy Crowe** *sop* **Tim Mead** *counterten*
**Andrew Staples** *ten* **Christopher Purves** *bass*
**Choir and Orchestra of Le Concert d'Astrée / Emmanuelle Haïm**
Erato Ⓑ ② 2564 62405-5 (136' • DDD)




Emmanuelle Haïm plumps for a neatly convenient four-soloist version presented in the main text of John Tobin's Bärenreiter edition. This comes close to matching what Handel did in 1752, but more significantly means we get the best versions of the numbers for which variant settings exist. Therefore, Tim Mead gives an articulately shaded performance of the superior alto setting of 'But who may abide the day of his coming' (written for the castrato Guadagni in 1750), Lucy Crowe displays her brilliant semiquaver flourishes in the reset 'Rejoice greatly' that replaced the 6/8 jig version sometime in the mid-1740s, and we hear the chorus version of 'Their sound is gone out' (perhaps one of the measures Handel took to appease the disappointed librettist Charles Jennens in 1745). We also hear the duet version of 'He shall feed his flock', sung sweetly by Mead and Crowe, with its Corellian pastoral-style strings paced and weighted perfectly by Haïm. She has also opted for longer versions of music Handel later abridged, such as the more extended thrills of 'Why do the nations rage so furiously together' (sung with perplexed inquisitiveness and suave authority by Christopher Purves, and with its basso continuo lines imaginatively detailed).

The delivery of the choruses is crisply focused and shaped impressively; Haïm sensibly opts to hire top-notch English freelancers organised by 'consultant' David Clegg and chorusmaster David Bates. There are a small number of occasions when Haïm could have let the music speak more naturally for itself, such as the mannered treatment of violin figures when the choir sings 'wonderful, counsellor' in

## GRAMOPHONE Archive

### Handel's Messiah

Three 'period' recordings that came before Haïm's and how Gramophone rated them




**APRIL 1980**
**Handel** Messiah
**Soloists; Academy of Ancient Music / Christopher Hogwood**
Decca ③ ● D189D3
(three 12in • £15.75 • nas)

No one until now has taken the crucial final steps towards recreating the work in the terms in which Handel conceived it. That distinction has now gone to Christopher Hogwood. Here we have the first *Messiah* that uses, as Handel always did, an all-male choir (boys and men), with women soloists; an orchestra of authentic instruments; the correct numbers, of singers as well as players, so that a true balance can be managed; and a text that exactly follows Handel's ascertainable intentions. The result is revelatory. *Stanley Sadie*




**DECEMBER 1997**
**Handel** Messiah
**Soloists; Gabrieli Consort and Players / Paul McCreesh**
Archiv Ⓕ ② 453 464-2AH2
(132' • DDD)

Drawn more to Sargent than the 'evangelism of the first "period" performances', McCreesh takes a very *fin de siècle* approach. As it happens, this is a modern *Messiah*. His modernism, on this evidence, is about striving to break from the shackles and urgently getting to the heart of the matter. The occasional residue of gratuitous 'period' gesture is redressed by a distinctly unmannered and, *in toto*, a highly compelling reading. A *Messiah* for the millennium? Certainly, one of the best around. *Jonathan Freeman-Attwood*




**DECEMBER 2006**
**Handel** Messiah
**Dunedin Consort / John Butt**
Linn Ⓕ ② CKD285
(140' • DDD/DSD)

The exuberant direction by harpsichordist John Butt is meticulously stylish and utterly devoid of crassly pretentious egotism. The playing is unerringly spontaneous and dramatically integrated with singers who illustrate profound appreciation of text. Butt and the Dunedin Consort marry astute scholarship to sincere artistic expression and the result is comfortably the freshest, most natural, revelatory and transparently joyful *Messiah* I have heard for a very long time. *David Vickers*

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'For unto us a child is born', and the unconvincing loud-soft pattern adopted for the choral exclamations at the outset of 'Hallelujah'. Nevertheless, the fusion of dramatic mood, orchestral texture and an inspired soloist often pays off handsomely, such as Purves's gorgeously serene 'For behold, darkness shall cover the earth' (no mere bluster here), Mead's cathartic embellishments in the *da capo* of 'He was despised', Andrew Staples's tastefully ornamented 'Thy rebuke hath broken his heart', and Crowe's fervent and radiant 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'.

**David Vickers**

## Howells

'When first thine eies unveil'
Mass in the Dorian Mode. Walking in the snow. Long, long ago. Levavi oculos meos. In youth is pleasure. Before me careless lying. O salutaris hostia. Salve regina. My eyes for beauty pine. When first thine eies unveil. O mortal man. Haec dies. Regina caeli. Nunc dimittis. Antiphon
**Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir / Paul Spicer** with **Jonathan Stamp** *org*
Somm Celeste Ⓕ SOMMCD0140 (79' • DDD)




There is something distinctly numinous about the sound of Howells's choral music, especially for unaccompanied choir, and in the hands of one of its specialists, Paul Spicer, it acquires an enhanced richness and insight into the phrasing of the composer's long, contrapuntal lines. This recording mixes secular and sacred, just as Ralph Allwood's fine recording with the Rodolfus Choir did; both choirs share a youthful, iridescent character, although Spicer's blend perhaps has the edge (though I miss in this programme part-songs such as 'The summer is coming'). The early *Mass in the Dorian Mode* and *O salutaris hostia* (which Spicer recorded for the first time on Chandos back in 1992 with the more mature sonority of the Finzi Singers – 12/92) is sung with control and tranquillity. We are also treated to three premiere recordings: the accompanied anthem *When first thine eies unveil* (the counterpart of the better-known *My eyes for beauty pine*), *O mortal man*, which uses the Sussex Mummers' Carol, and the contemplative wedding anthem *Levavi oculos meos* for sopranos and organ, sung with great sensitivity and warmth here. The two five-part madrigals *In youth is pleasure* and *Before me careless lying* – products of wartime – are sung with great vivacity and bear witness to Howells's infatuation with the Tudor art. But for that intangible intensity and mystical atmosphere, the linguistic amalgam of sonorous choral textures, spine-shivering sound-moments and multiple expressive appoggiaturas in *Walking in the snow* and the magical *Long, long ago* offer the most eloquent and personal insight into the composer's inner world. A lovely CD.

**Jeremy Dibble**

*Choral Works – selected comparison:*
*Rodolfus Ch, Allwood (SIGN) SIGCD190*

## Mendelssohn

Symphony No 2, 'Lobgesang', Op 52
**Lisa Larsson, Malin Hartelius** *sops*
**Jörg Dürmüller** *ten* **Ensemble Corund; Musikkollegium Winterthur / Douglas Boyd**
Dabringhaus und Grimm Ⓕ MDG901 1857-6 (63' • DDD/DSD)




Mendelssohn's choral symphony, the *Hymn of Praise*, still deserves a wider currency than it presently enjoys. Cast as a hybrid orchestral symphony/choral cantata, it offers some of Mendelssohn's most lyrical melodic writing (especially in the liltingly restless second movement, *Allegretto un poco agitato*), as well as a wealth of memorably sturdy choral sections. Commissioned by Leipzig's City Council in 1840 to mark the 400th anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg's invention of letterpress printing, Mendelssohn rose to the occasion with a heartfelt hour-long celebratory piece which was groundbreaking in its overall form and use of thematic transformation. He was rightfully enthusiastic about the result. Of the three orchestral movements, the slow *Adagio religioso* is suitably prayerful, with some exquisitely voiced (and tuned) passages for woodwind and horns, and warm-toned divided violas and cellos. The Swiss orchestra of the Musikkollegium Winterthur clearly relish this languid music in particular.

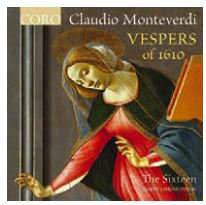
The transition from symphony to cantata is achieved with a beautifully judged bridge which builds up to a glowing first choral entry. Fugal entries are crisp, with sprightly dotted rhythms. The trio of soloists are all of high calibre and caught by the microphones quite naturally in a spacious acoustic. Jörg Dürmüller phrases with great intelligence and a lithe assurance. The two sopranos are well matched and – despite an occasional tuning mishap – blend superbly with the horn obbligato in their 'I waited for the Lord' duet.

Douglas Boyd draws out all of the poetic potential of this underrated masterpiece. This new interpretation must be one of the top contenders.

**Malcolm Riley**

## Monteverdi

Vespro della Beata Vergine
**The Sixteen / Harry Christophers**
Coro Ⓕ ② COR16126 (106' • DDD • T/t)




Having released on three separate discs Monteverdi's late (1641) published collection of sacred music, *Selva morale e spirituale* (12/10, 8/12, 7/13), Harry Christophers and The Sixteen take the logical step of visiting his much earlier and more famous one – known of course as the *Vespers* of 1610. The approach is pretty straightforward: a 'concert-style' performance with a *tutti* choir of 22, no extra instrumental doubling, no added chant, and with all the numbers presented in the usual (ie published) order. It thus differs significantly from Christophers's 1988 version for Hyperion, a liturgical reconstruction of a Vespers for St Barbara with chants, added instrumental sonatas and extensive reordering. The decision whether to perform the 'Lauda Jerusalem' and *Magnificat* at low or high pitch is avoided by offering both (a unique solution on record I think), though Christophers's personal preference is presumably revealed by the fact the high version is the one *in situ*, while the low can only be incorporated by means of track reprogramming and a hop or two between discs.

The opportunity for direct comparison is interesting, however. At low pitch the sound is undoubtedly richer and the performers more comfortable, while high pitch brings an element of strain but greater intensity of sound. Indeed, in this it rather stands out from the rest of the performance, which avoids the boldly dramatic (a là Gardiner), the swiftly changeable (Alessandrini) or the atmospherically beautiful (Savall). Unfortunately this means more losses than gains. Although there is no doubting the expertise of Christophers's singers and players, the sum of everyone's efforts on this occasion is surprisingly bloodless. Christophers's brisk momentum, cleverly achieved without necessarily taking things all that quickly, works well in the *Magnificat* but elsewhere rushes many of the music's more exquisite corners and often fails to realise the work's grandeur. Above all, it is a pity that some of the soloists had not conveyed the aching



Eloquent insight: Howells's biographer Paul Spicer reveals the composer's inner world on a new recording with his Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir

eloquence of Monteverdi's writing more memorably, or in places simply done more to grab their moment. The recorded sound is relatively intimate, not churchy even though recorded in a church, and with a certain graininess to the choral texture.

In a piece with so many places that can really excite the listener, this recording left me a little disappointed. There are plenty of others to choose from but if you want a recent one that hits most of the required spots, try Leonardo García Alarcón's with Cappella Mediterranea and the Namur Chamber Choir on Ambronay (8/14).

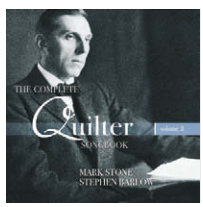
**Lindsay Kemp**

*Selected comparisons:*
*Sixteen, Christophers (4/89R) (HYPE) CDD22028*
*Capella Reial, Savall (2/90R) (ALIA) AVSA9855*
*EBS, Gardiner (1/91) (ARCH) 429 565-2AH*
*Conc Italiano, Alessandrini (2/05) (NAIV) OP30403*
*Cappella Mediterranea, Alarcón (8/14) (AMBR) AMY041*

## Quilter

'The Complete Quilter Songbook, Vol 2' Five Jacobean Lyrics, Op 28. Two Songs (1903). Fairy Lullaby. Three Songs of William Blake, Op 20. Island of Dreams. At close of day. The Answer. Five English Love Lyrics, Op 24. Three Songs, Op 18 Nos 1-3. April Love. Two Songs (1897). Spring Voices. Four Songs of the Sea, Op 1. Tulips. To Julia, Op 8

**Mark Stone** *bar* **Stephen Barlow** *pf*
Stone Records Ⓕ 5060192 780307 (78' • DDD • T)




The talented baritone Mark Stone adds another fine disc to his discography. Once again, the range of colour and dynamic in his singing is impressive, precisely geared to the words of each song. In every way this is an English equivalent to German Lieder or French mélodie.

Roger Quilter is an extraordinary composer. Born into a wealthy family, he was a delicate child and ill health dogged him throughout his life. He was educated at Eton but never had any idea of trying to earn a living. It did not help that he was homosexual, at a time when any gay activity was strictly illegal. Nonetheless, he was wealthy enough to leave his parents' apartment and set up on his own nearby in Mayfair, devoting his whole life to writing songs, 38 of which are on this second disc (of four) in Stone's 'Complete Quilter Songbook'.

Going from one song to another is a delight. It reminds me that Quilter's songs were favourites with the great Jessye Norman, drawing out her great range of expression in their easy lyricism and easy freshness. When each song is so delightful it is hard to pick out particular examples, except that Quilter's love of the poets of the 17th century – Herrick, Suckling, Lovelace, etc – drew out some of his finest inspirations. As in previous discs from Mark Stone, Stephen Barlow in his accompaniments matches his partner perfectly. **Edward Greenfield**

## Stradella

La forza delle stelle, ovvero Il Damone
**Nora Tabbush, Claudia Di Carlo** *sops* **Raffaele Pé** *counterten* **Maurizio Dalena** *ten* **Mauro Borgioni** *bass* **Ensemble Mare Nostrum / Andrea De Carlo**
Arcana Ⓕ A377 (50' • DDD)



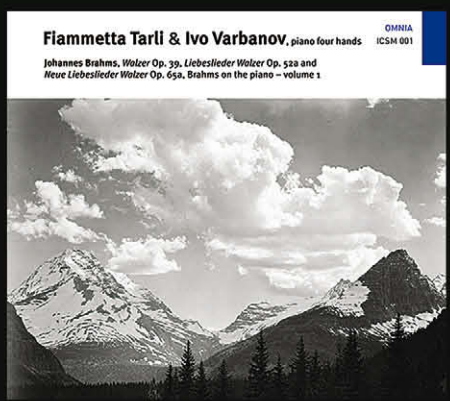
Sebastiano Baldini was a poet so well known as a writer of texts for music in his native Rome that almost every composer working there in the mid-17th century would have enjoyed some form of collaboration with him. The playboy composer Alessandro Stradella was no exception; and, given their choice to work together despite the

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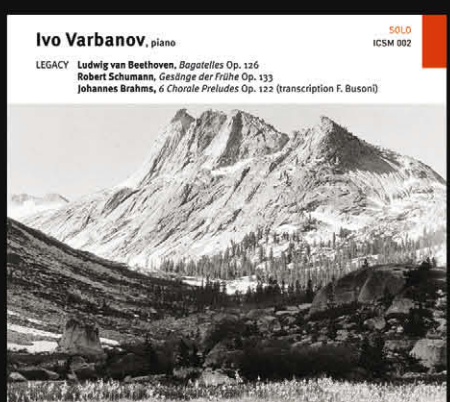
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clashing of their towering egos (usually over Stradella's slashing editing of Baldini's texts for other composers), it's hardly surprising that the result was a combination of music and text so inextricable that it's impossible to tell which came first.

The 'world premiere' of *La forza delle stelle* on this disc is not the first recording of the piece per se but the first conflation of the two versions over which Stradella and Baldini argued, and consequently the most complete representation of the whole project currently available. *La forza* is a work of considerable craft (researched and edited by Carolyn Gianturco, whose reconstructions of this type have long been worth seeking out), beautifully galvanised by the Roman group Ensemble Mare Nostrum as an easy progression through a satirical story of love and fate. There is more to interest the ear here than there often is in 'new' discoveries and the performances far outstrip those commonly associated with such niche recordings: they provide powerful but clean operatic interpretations – Raffaele Pé and Nora Tabbush are particular treats – of the extreme expressionism of these two artistic collaborators, both of whom lived lives coloured by dissoluteness and debauchery. **Caroline Gill**

## Sullivan

On Shore and Sea. Kenilworth
**Sally Silver** *sop* **Louise Winter** *mez*
**Nico Darmanin** *ten* **Donald Maxwell** *bass-bar*
**The John Powell Singers; Victorian Opera Northwest / Richard Bonynge**
Dutton Epoque Ⓕ CDLX7310 (65' • DDD • T/t)




Recordings of Sullivan's choral music are a rare commodity these days, and even rarer still are performances of these two works, written in the first flush of the composer's career. *Kenilworth*, a premiere recording, was written for the Birmingham Festival of 1864, at a time when Sullivan continued to enjoy the accolades established by his incidental music to *The Tempest*, a graduation piece composed at the end of his time at Leipzig in 1861 and first heard in London to much acclaim in 1862. Styled a 'masque', there is much to admire in *Kenilworth*: the slick orchestration, the euphonious melody of the individual songs and dances, the ingenious multi-layered counterpoint of the chorus and quartet 'Let fauns the cymbals ring' and the fine nocturnal scena 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps', with its strong reminiscences of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

As part of the first concert to be given at the newly opened Royal Albert Hall, *On Shore and Sea* was composed for the 1871 London International Exhibition. A dramatic cantata, set in 16th-century Genoa, it is in many ways a one-act opera full of intriguing exoticisms headed by the central 'Moresque dance' but with a sentiment not unlike earlier 19th-century rescue operas.

The interpretations are rather mixed. The chorus throughout seems to me understrength and needs more energy, precision and balance with the orchestra. Much of the solo singing is attractive but it lacks a certain theatrical extroversion and character essential to Sullivan's genius for drama and his affinity for the Italian and French stage. Nevertheless, it is excellent to have this CD to appreciate the broader nature of the composer's gifts beyond the Savoy operettas. **Jeremy Dibble**

## Szymanowski

Love Songs of Hafiz, Op 26[a]. Symphonies – No 1, Op 15; No 3, 'The Song of the Night', Op 27[b]
**[a]Ben Johnson** *ten* **BBC Symphony [ab]Chorus and Orchestra / Edward Gardner**
Chandos Ⓕ CHSA5143 (66' • DDD/DSD • T/t)




With this third volume of Edward Gardner's series of Szymanowski's orchestral works, performances are particularly cosmopolitan. And why not? The works here reflect influences from many nationalities: Symphony No 1 is Reger on opium, while Ravel and Scriabin are strong influences amid the perfumed Arabian languor of the two other works. The choral/orchestral forces of Symphony No 3 benefit greatly from Chandos's typically airy acoustic and Edward Gardner's unindulgent but still atmospheric balancing of elements, with voices treated as just one of many elements in a balanced sound picture – in contrast to more choral-heavy recordings ranging from Antal Dorati (Decca, 7/81) to Pierre Boulez (DG, 11/10).

It's an architectural approach, the main side effect being increased awareness of Szymanowski's antecedents. Symphony No 3 almost comes off like Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* with the events reordered. Turning back to the more explicitly Polish Witold Rowicki recording (4/68 – nla), the composer's compositional motivation is so apparent among the details that you don't care where the actual sound was borrowed from.

Since Symphony No 1 is a somewhat clotted early work (that, by the way, benefits from the do-I-sleep-or-do-I-wake dreaminess of this performance), the primary distinction of this set is the less-heard *Love Songs of Hafiz*, Op 26, written around the same time as the Third Symphony and showing the composer even deeper into an imaginary Arabian lotus land. This one uses the German text (other recordings are in Polish), which seems to suit the vocal lines just fine, especially as sung by tenor Ben Johnson, whose relatively lean voice (in contrast with the Eastern European sopranos sometimes heard in this piece) is very much responsive to the text's meaning. **David Patrick Stearns**

## Tavener

Akhmatova Requiem[a]. Six Russian Folksongs[b]
**[a]Phyllis Bryn-Julson, [b]Elise Ross** *sops* **[a]John Shirley-Quirk** *bar* **[b]Nash Ensemble; [a]BBC Symphony Orchestra / Gennadi Rozhdestvensky**
NMC Ⓕ NMCD208 (69' • ADD • T)
Recorded live at the [b]Roundhouse, London, September 2, 1979; [a]Royal Albert Hall, London, August 27, 1981
From BBC Radio Classics 15656 9197-2 (9/97)




I have maintained since the moment I heard it in 1981 that Tavener's *Akhmatova Requiem* is a masterpiece. Not many people agreed at the time, and it still mystifies many of the composer's admirers. I sincerely hope that this reissue of the live recording made at the 1981 Proms will change that.

Of course it is a difficult work: Akhmatova's poetry is itself difficult in its profound bleakness, and any setting of it would of course have to reflect that. Tavener himself said that the work came nearer than any other he had written to being tragic, without that sense of redemption and transcendence that usually characterised his music. It is correspondingly dark and bleak, and transparently scored in a way that suggests the late Shostakovich, but whatever consolation may be found is inside that very bleakness. The performance is outstanding; Rozhdestvensky believed absolutely in the work and he drives the BBC SO as though his life depended on it. Phyllis Bryn-Julson was at the height of her powers and is absolutely superb in her grasp of the dramatic sweep of both poetry and music here, while the late John Shirley-

Quirk is commanding in his rendition of the prayers from the Orthodox funeral service. The heart of the piece is their ecstatically beautiful duet, 'Magdalene smote her breast', the point at which transcendence is most nearly achieved.

The *Six Russian Folksongs*, written a couple of years earlier, are a lightweight pendant, given a fine outing here by Elise Ross and the Nash Ensemble. NMC deserves nothing but praise for making this remarkable music available again; and whoever had the idea of using Malevich's *Mystic Suprematism* (red cross on black circle) as the cover image deserves vast congratulations. **Ivan Moody**

## Tchaikovsky

'Romances'
Six Romances, Op 6 – No 1, Do not believe, my friend; No 5, Why?. Six Romances, Op 16 – No 1, Lullaby; No 2, Wait. Six Romances, Op 38 – No 1, Don Juan's Serenade; No 3, Amid the din of the ball; No 5, The love of a dead man. Tears, Op 46 No 3. Seven Romances, Op 47 – No 1, If only I had known; No 2, Softly the spirit flew up to heaven; No 7, Was I not a blade of grass?. Twelve Romances, Op 60 – No 2, I don't tell you anything. No 11, The Exploit. Serenade, Op 63 No 6. Again, as before, alone, Op 73 No 6. My genius, my angel, my friend. So soon forgotten
**Natalia Petrozhitskaya** *sop* **Dmitry Zuev** *bar*
**Antonina Kadobnova** *pf*
Melodiya Ⓕ MELCD100 2278 (61' • DDD)

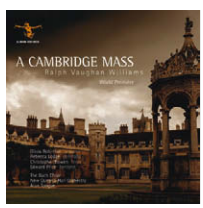



'Dedicated to the 175th anniversary of the Russian genius of music', as the booklet proclaims, this disc showcases two talented young Russian singers in 17 of Tchaikovsky's songs. The 175th anniversary of Tchaikovsky's birth actually falls in 2015 but you should lose no time in listening to the soprano Natalia Petrozhitskaya and the baritone Dmitry Zuev. They both studied at the Moscow Conservatoire and both now feature among the leading soloists at the capital's Stanislavsky-Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre. All 17 songs in their programme are among Tchaikovsky's most familiar, which is just as well, since the booklet includes no texts. Track lists in Cyrillic and English together with a brief note on the artists and music have to suffice but the singing itself carries you with it.

Hearing Petrozhitskaya in 'So soon forgotten' highlights her operatic gifts and explains why she has been credited as such a poignant Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*: there is real passion here, together with a relish of Russian vowels and consonants, but there is also, as her other seven songs reveal, a capacity for subtle inflection and a softly floated line. The centrepiece of the recital is 'Tears', one of Tchaikovsky's Six Duets, Op 46, in which Petrozhitskaya is partnered by Zuev. Zuev then embarks on his own eight songs, starting with Tchaikovsky's earliest, 'My genius, my angel, my friend', and ending with one of his last, 'Again, as before, alone'. Zuev's timbre attractively blends freshness with maturity, unforced intensity and a compelling emotional resonance. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Vaughan Williams · Parry

**Parry** Blest pair of sirens
**Vaughan Williams** A Cambridge Mass
**Olivia Robinson** *sop* **Rebecca Lodge** *contr*
**Christopher Bowen** *ten* **Edward Price** *bar*
**Martin Ennis** *org* **The Bach Choir;**
**New Queen's Hall Orchestra / Alan Tongue**
Albion Ⓕ ALBCD0020 (56' • DDD)
Recorded live at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, March 3, 2011




That a large-scale work for chorus, orchestra and soloists by Vaughan Williams should only have received its world premiere performance in 2011 seems extraordinary. That the work was documented and known about for years before makes it all the more so.

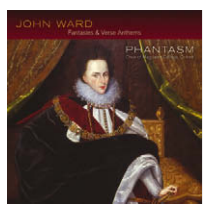
Submitted for the composer's Doctor of Music degree at Cambridge in 1899, Vaughan Williams's *Cambridge Mass* sat quietly in the university library for over a century, dismissed by academics as an apprentice work, until Alan Tongue produced and published a performing edition, conducting the work's premiere at Croydon's Fairfield Halls in 2011. It is that performance that is now released as a live recording by the Vaughan Williams Society's Albion label.

Michael Kennedy has described the work as 'the real Vaughan Williams on the way to greatness'. The emphasis here is surely on 'on the way'. Tuneful and athletic, the Mass owes a rather too obvious debt to others – Brahms, Dvořák, even Bach – to discern the composer's own voice clearly. There's some accomplished fugal writing in the *Credo*'s extended Amen, some attractive touches of orchestration, particularly in the use of the brass, and a rather heady sub-Mendelssohn *Sanctus* that glows with the mysticism that would later gild *The Pilgrim's Progress*. But the general tone is rather too squarely of bombast, and the harmonic language lacks the distinctive edge of the later (and slighter) Mass in G minor. The Bach Choir and the New Queen's Hall Orchestra – particularly the brass – give a performance full of period character and verve, though a little more pace from Tongue might have helped some of the longer sections maintain more dramatic impetus.

This is a portrait of an artist still under construction – a vivid and fascinating glimpse of Vaughan Williams before he was truly himself. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## J Ward

Fantasias a 4, VDGS21-26. Down, caitiff wretch (Part 1). Mount up, my soul. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord. Let God Arise. Praise the Lord, O my soul. Prayer is an endless chain (Part 2). This is a joyful, happy holy day
**Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford / Daniel Hyde; Phantasm**
Linn Ⓕ CKD427 (59' • DDD/DSD)




John Ward has had an odd career on record. He was just another name (mostly forgotten unless you were a viol player) until the Consort of Musicke madrigal group stunned the world in their recorded debut with a two-record set of his complete printed madrigals in 1981 (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 9/81). Later they did another with some of his manuscript pieces. But it was not until five years ago that Phantasm recorded his entire known output for six and five viols (11/09) – yet again a reminder that this was a composer with less range than some of his contemporaries but astonishing depths.

Here Phantasm present the six 'Oxford' fantasias for four viols – perhaps implying their view that the remainder (all in a single late manuscript) are not by the same composer. And they join forces with the Magdalen choir to give us more or less his whole surviving verse anthems, including a couple of pieces that required an element of reconstruction (nicely done by Ian Payne) and seem to be still unpublished.

Phantasm play with their customary verve, just occasionally preferring energy to rhythmic steadiness but never losing the shape of the relatively short fantasias. For the verse anthems, Daniel Hyde opts for a slightly steadier approach, not always keeping the energy alive for these much larger and more ambitious pieces but always allowing the music to breathe and show its details. The current Magdalen



First outing: Vaughan Williams's Cambridge Mass gets its world premiere performance and recording at Fairfield Halls, Croydon

choir has a range of marvellous voices used for the solos, with particularly admirable diction, especially from the trebles.

**David Fallows**

## Zelenka

Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae, ZWV53
**Damien Guillon** *counterten* **Daniel Johannsen** *ten* **Tomáš Král** *bass* **Collegium Marianum / Jana Semerádová**
Supraphon Ⓕ SU4173-2 (74' • DDD)



If the 'Z' section of your CD library is looking under-nourished, you ought quickly to acquire this new addition to the Zelenka discography. Recordings of his *Lamentations of Jeremiah* are rare – this is only the fourth complete recorded cycle to have been released – and this generously filled disc will definitely help to reinforce Zelenka's position as not only one of Bohemia's Baroque 'greats' but also worthy of ranking with Handel, Vivaldi and Bach.

This release contains the first of two cycles of the six Lamentations, composed in 1722-23 for the liturgy of Tenebrae, the Services of Shadows which are held in Holy Week. They are all scored for a solo voice and small orchestra, and generally feature a pattern of alternating arias and recitative with meditative plainchant introductions providing an interesting link to earlier Renaissance settings of the texts. In comparison to his contemporaries, Zelenka's style will seem almost quaint, if not downright old-fashioned. At times this could be music of a decade or two earlier, for example the Handel of the 1700s – there are a couple of passages which could have come directly from his *Dixit Dominus*. The shadow of Corelli's string-writing also looms large at times.

Of the performances themselves, all is splendid. The balance of the period instruments is perfectly judged, with intelligent and characterful singing from all three soloists. The greatest and most welcome surprise is the inclusion of the obbligato chalumeau in the Lamentation for Good Friday – a delicious conclusion to a memorable release. **Malcolm Riley**

## Renée Fleming

'Vienna at the Turn of the 20th Century'
**Gershwin** Porgy and Bess – Summertime **Korngold** Sterbelied, Op 14 No 1. Das Heldengrab am Pruth, Op 9 No 5. Was du mir bist, Op 22 No 1. Das eilende Bachlein, Op 27 No 2. Die tote Stadt – Frag mich oft Gluck, das mir verblieb **Mahler** Rückert-Lieder **Schoenberg** Erwartung, Op 2 No 1. Jane Grey, Op 12 No 1 **J Strauss II** I'm in love with Vienna (arr Tiomkin) **R Strauss** Zueignung, Op 10 No 1 **Wolf** Five Songs to Texts by Goethe **Zemlinsky** Five Songs to Poems by Richard Dehmel
**Renée Fleming** *sop* **Maciej Pikulski** *pf*
*Video director* **Brian Large**
ArtHaus Musik Ⓕ DVD 102 196; Ⓕ Blu-ray 108 117
(88' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DD5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Golden Hall of the Musikverein, Vienna, December 11, 2012




Here Renée Fleming joins a long line of star recitalists falling victim to later-career stage affectation. Though Maria Callas can't be fully understood without the videos that show how her voice and physicality were all of a piece, Lotte Lehmann is probably better remembered by those not familiar with her oft-documented Kabuki-like repertoire of melodramatic physical gestures. In Fleming's Vienna recital, voice and face sometimes tell different stories, the

dissonance between the two creating a fatal distraction from her artistry and fairly healthy vocal state at the expense of the poetic authenticity.

Fleming's programme aims high, themed around the great period of Viennese culture in the decades before the rise of Nazism in 1933. Her chronological arrangement begins with Hugo Wolf looking back to Goethe, continues with Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* and then goes on to little-known groups of Zemlinsky and Korngold songs that can be heard as ongoing dialogues with the possibilities of atonality. But, from the first moments, the pastoral Wolf songs seem like a series of photo opportunities. Though her Mahler performances would have benefited from pianist Maciej Pikulski taking a stronger stance, Fleming is more integrated musically and dramatically though her visual presentation is so overwrought that she's ripe for intervention from Overactresses Anonymous.

More interestingly, the Schoenberg, Zemlinsky and Korngold sets sink into the cool, cruel world of pre-war Viennese sexuality, the Zemlinsky songs being particularly full of lurid, self-debasing ruminations, while Korngold's complex harmonies are a good match for poems about what makes one's blood 'sparkle'. During the Korngold, Fleming is especially prone to flash a reassuring smile that seems to tell listeners that it's only a song. The lighter encores, mostly Viennese in character, show Fleming courting the audience's allegiances, shamelessly growing ever more free with her vocalism and becoming particularly tasteless during her own improvisation in Gershwin's 'Summertime'. Would it be better to just listen to the DVD? Much. But that's not what this medium is. **David Patrick Stearns**

## 'Canción amorosa'

**Alcala** Todas las mañanitas **Bonet** Haidé **Gomis** Si la mar fuera de tinta **Guridi** Cómo quieres que adivine **Lavilla** Aldapeko, Mariya **Montsalvatge** Cançó amorosa. Paisatge del Montseny **Nin** Paño murciano **Toldrà** Después que te conocí. Maig **Turina** Si con mis deseos **Traditional** Nik baditut. La tarara. Tres hijas tiene el buen rey. Adío querida

**Corinne Winters** *sop* **Steven Blier** *pf* with **Maya Lahyani** *mez* **Oren Fader** *gtr*

GPR Records Ⓕ GPR70013 (49' • DDD)




What? A Spanish song disc that does not have Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas*? That cycle seems all but obligatory on such collections but not on this fascinating programme, which aims beyond and below Falla, often delving into the streets and parlours where serious composers no doubt drew inspiration. With the cover photo of Corrine Winters looking like Louise Brooks in a black pageboy helmet of hair, you're ready for anything, including a valid alternative to your Montserrat Caballé and Victoria de los Angeles recordings.

That's not quite what materialises. Backed by the encyclopedic mind of pianist Steven Blier, Winters has songs by fairly familiar names such as Toldrà, Nin and Montsalvatge, but also traditional Basque and Sephardic poems and songs, all hugely welcome. One parlour-style duet, 'Si la mar fuera di tinta' by Gomis (featuring mezzo-soprano Maya Lahyani), feels like a rhapsodic though humble cousin of Offenbach's Barcarolle. Another popular song is arranged by none other than Lorca.

Less fortunately, Winters's voice – so voluminous and enveloping at first – begins to reveal some of its less finished qualities. It's not the cleanest voice for art song, sometimes unfurling with an unsure sense of line, and blooming slightly out of control during some sustained notes. Some of the modal qualities of the Sephardic music are sung with little sympathy. Also, the songs tap the same part of her voice, which makes a number of them sound alike, both in terms of vocal sound and interpretation. But stay tuned. The voice is full of allure and may be an important talent – if it grows in the right directions. **David Patrick Stearns**

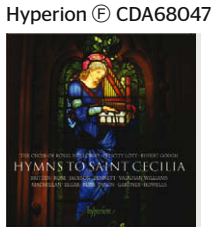
## 'Hymns to St Cecilia'

**RR Bennett** Verses on St Cecilia's Day **Bliss** Sing, mortals! **Britten** Hymn to St Cecilia, Op 27 **Dyson** Live for ever, glorious Lord **Elgar** There is sweet music, Op 53 No 1 **J Gardner** A Song for St Cecilia's Day, Op 119 **Howells** A Hymn for St Cecilia **G Jackson** La musique[a] **MacMillan** Cecilia virgo **Rose** Feast Song for St Cecilia **Vaughan Williams** Silence and Music

[a]**Dame Felicity Lott** *sop*

**The Choir of Royal Holloway / Rupert Gough**

Hyperion Ⓕ CDA68047 (71' • DDD • T/t)




With their latest disc, The Choir of Royal Holloway and Music Director Rupert Gough ensure that Oxbridge ensembles don't have it all their own way when it comes to great university choirs. Gough's projects are reliably interesting and this latest – a collection of 20th- and 21st-century British anthems dedicated to St Cecilia – is no different.

Of course, Britten's extraordinary setting of Auden is at the heart of the disc, but surrounded by much less familiar works, including two premiere recordings. James MacMillan's *Cecilia virgo* has all the makings of a modern classic, opening in clouds of cluster-chords and neo-Renaissance textures. Here, the *cori spezzati* of the Gabrielis are viewed through a contemporary lens, softening and dissolving the edges of the counterpoint. Gabriel Jackson's *La musique* sets Elizabeth Bishop's heady verse with graceful lyricism. Unfortunately here, Felicity Lott's solo line seems to come from another world to the still, blended choral textures beneath, jangling intrusively in the ear.

If the handful of soprano solos spread across the disc are anything to go by, Gough has an exceptional group of singers here. They are impressively responsive, shifting from the rich homophony of Howells's *A Hymn for St Cecilia* (anchored always in the bass), to the fidgety contrapuntal writing of Britten's 'I have no shadow' episode and embracing the bluesy harmonies of Richard Rodney Bennett's *Verses on St Cecilia's Day*. Only Elgar's *There is sweet music* could do with a little more flexibility in the tempi, a little less matter-of-factness tempering its unembarrassed sentimentality.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Lamento'

**Carissimi** Lamento in morte di Maria Stuarda **Frescobaldi** Capriccio di durezze **Kapsberger** Toccata seconda arpeggiata **Monteverdi** Lamenti d'Arianna **Provenzale** (attrib) Squarciato appena avea **Rossi** Lamento della Regina di Svezia **Strozzi** Lagrime mie

**Romina Basso** *contr*

**Latinas Nostra / Markellos Chryssicos**

Naive Ⓕ V5390 (64' • DDD)




Romina Basso collaborates with the Greek continuo trio Latinitas Nostra in this curate's egg of laments by Italian composers of the seicento. I'm not too sure about the Middle Eastern viola da gamba improvisation that launches *Lagrime mie* by Venetian noblewoman Barbara Strozzi (a pupil of Cavalli), but Basso sings with emotional virtuosity in an intensely plangent performance. A capriccio by Frescobaldi leads into Monteverdi's famous lament from his otherwise lost 1608 opera *Arianna*, in which the performers settle


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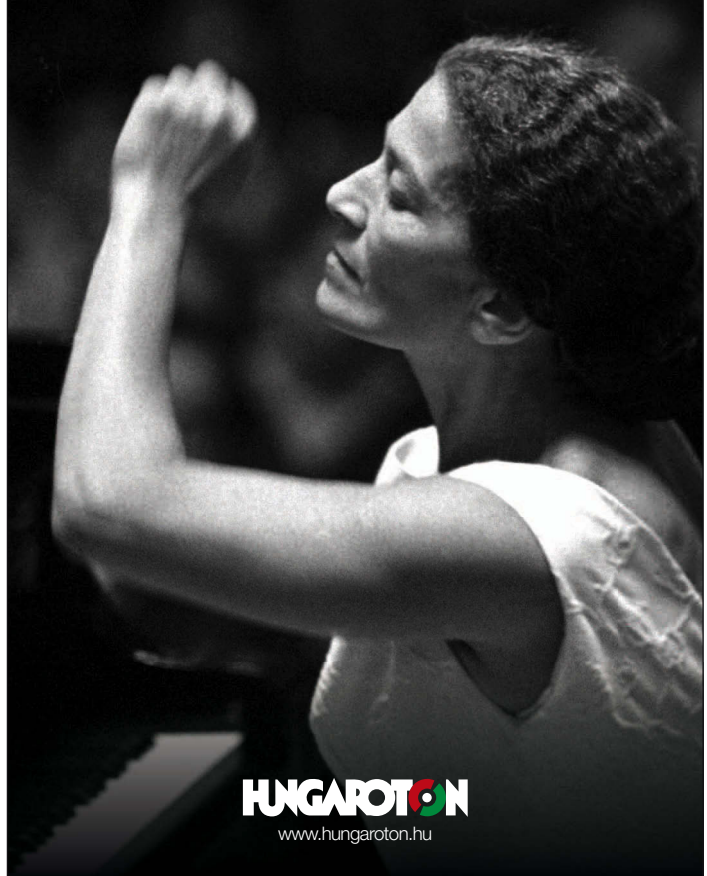
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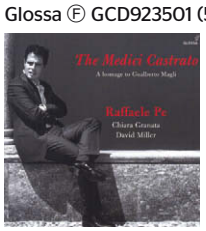
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down and let the sentimental rhetoric of the music speak for itself.

In other selections the continuo accompaniments tend to be characterised strongly, with some infrequent lapses into wildness. But there is no denying the instrumentalists are given a full rein to express themselves. This does not always benefit all of the music all of the time, but these works have been recorded to high standards before, so there are alternative approaches available for the faint-hearted. A softly arpeggiated toccata by Kapsberger introduces Rossi's depiction of Queen Christina of Sweden's anguish upon learning of the death of her husband, King Gustavus Adolphus, in the Battle of Lützen. The subject matter and style of Rossi's lament is irreverently satirised in *Squarciato appena avea*, attributed inconclusively to Provenzale. Involving four additional singers, a violinist and a percussionist, this sly comical parody quoting bawdy folksongs serves as an engrossing endnote and antidote. **David Vickers**

## 'The Medici Castrato'

'A Tribute to Gualberto Magli (?-1625)'
**Anonymous** Se fama al mondo **F Caccini** Dispiegate, guance amate **G Caccini** Amarilli mia bella (arr Nauwach). Sfogava con le stelle **Ciccolini** Solo et pensoso **Lambardi** O felice quel giorno **Montesardo** Hor che la nott'ombrosa **Monteverdi** Orfeo – Musica (Prologue); Primo intermezzo; Speranza; Possente spirto; Proserpina **Nauwach** Jetzund kömpt die Nacht herbey. Tempesta di dolcezza. **d'India** Ancidetemi pur (Lamento di Giasone). Piangono al pianger mio **Trabaci** Toccata seconda
**Raffaele Pé** *counterten*
**Chiara Granata** *triple hp* **David Miller** *theo*
Glossa Ⓕ GCD923501 (57' • DDD)




Gualberto Magli (*d*1625) was one of the great voices of his age. In 1608 he sang at the wedding celebrations for the Medici heir to the grand duchy of Florence; this was one of the high points of his career but the previous year he had participated in an event of greater musical significance, the first performance of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at Mantua in 1607. This musical portrait devotes ample space to both events, the former represented by the solos for Music, Hope and Proserpina, and the latter by selections by the Caccinis and Sigismondo d'India. Some lighter pieces complete the programme, each having some credible connection with Magli's life and career. A few of them reprise texts better known from elsewhere, including a 'new' setting of *Solo e pensoso* by a living composer but credibly rendered in the style of the period. There's even the obligatory echo piece in the shape of Montesardo's *Hor che la nott'ombrosa*. In short, a most engaging and enterprising programme, which ticks all the boxes (or very nearly so) with easy charm.

The countertenor Raffaele Pé has a bright, lucid timbre that cuts often to the heart of things, confidence and athleticism in the high register, and a hint of sweetness lower down (though at times also a hint of fragility near at the very bottom of the range). In the Monteverdi the articulation of the text is not always as clear as one might wish. D'India's *Lamento di Giasone* is perhaps the set's highlight on the dramatic side, and Francesca Caccini's *Dispiegate, guance amate* on the lighter. But a special feature of the recital is the contribution of the two continuo players, who establish themselves as equal partners throughout, and whose contribution can be savoured on its own terms. **Fabrice Fitch**

## 'Ostsee'

**Bertouch** Du Tochter Zion, freu dich sehr. Mein Herz ist bereit. Sonatas – No 10; No 13 **Theile** Ach, dass ich hören solte dass Gott. Die Seele Christi heilige mich **Vierdanck** Suite
**Ingeborg Dalheim** *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland** *contr* **Njål Sparbo** *bass* **Trondheim Barokk**
Simax Ⓕ PSC1330 (69' • DDD)




'Bertouch's distinction did not lie in producing music of intrinsic value or interest.' It takes chutzpah to dismiss the composer central to your project so thoroughly in your own booklet-notes but that's what the Norwegian ensemble Trondheim Barokk have done, with disarming Baltic frankness. And though the music of Georg von Bertouch (1668-1743) is easily outclassed by his military career and his role as a man of letters, to damn it so vehemently is to do it a disservice.

Recorded here for the first time, Bertouch's Sonatas No 13 in C minor and No 10 in A minor, each scored for two violins and continuo, are graceful affairs in a style that owes a debt to Corelli. Solo lines echo and imitate in ever-intensifying patterns, occasionally releasing into brief bursts of dance, glancing coyly towards tavern as well as court.

Bertouch is paired here with music by Johann Theile (1646-1724) and Johann Vierdanck (1605-46) – all composers from Saxony who spent time working and living in the Baltic Sea area. If it's hard to hear the shared musical identity that Trondheim Barokk claim for them, it's certainly not difficult to appreciate the gentle charms of their repertoire. Church cantatas bustle with melody and colour, enriched by chamber organ continuo and a superb trio of soloists, enlivening Lutheran restraint with cheeky gestures: a sly chromatic intrusion, a sudden battle of supremacy between singer and violin.

This disc has a quiet appeal that only grows with better acquaintance, a follow-up that reinforces both the skill and the quirkiness of the group's 2012 debut 'Le roman des lumières' (K617). **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Vieni, amor mio!'

'Romanze italiane'
**Bazzini** Proibizion **Bellini** Le souvenir présent céleste **Catalani** Chanson groënlandaise. Senza baci **Donaudy** O del mio amato ben **Faccio** Ei m'ha tradita musica **Falchi** Mentivi **Leoncavallo** Canzonetta di stile antico. Vieni amor mio **Mancinelli** Le ondine **Martucci** Al folto bosco. No, svaniti, non sono i sogni. Su'l mar la navicella **Ponchielli** L'abbandono **Rotoli** Non ti voglio amar **Ruta** Non dimandar. Voglio morir con te **Tirindelli** Amore, amor! **Toselli** Serenata, Op 6 **Tosti** Ideale. L'ultimo bacio
**Lisa Houben** *sop* **Daniel Blumenthal** *pf*
Pavane Ⓕ ADW7563 (67' • DDD)




This CD comprises Italian love songs by composers better known for their operas. Surprisingly, they include few that are well-known, with Toselli's 'Serenata' an obvious exception. It makes an attractive, undemanding sequence, though Lisa Houben's rather fruity soprano tends to lack variety. By contrast, Daniel Blumenthal's accompaniments are nicely varied, some simply chordal, following the melody, but some like harp arpeggios, with others establishing strong four-in-a-bar rhythms.

Catalani's 'Chanson groënlandaise' is the longest on the recording and the only song with a French text. The three songs by Martucci will present an unfamiliar name to many, ending with the delightful 'No, svaniti, non sono i sogni' in a swinging triple time. Following immediately is Tosti's 'L'ultimo bacio', with the composer (a favourite with Queen Victoria) also represented by the much better-known 'Ideale'. Blumenthal performs on an instrument that sounds almost like a fortepiano, apt in this repertory.
**Edward Greenfield**

# REISSUES

In the second of a two-part round-up, **James Jolly** recommends some of the most appealing sets of 2014

## *Fizz and flair aplenty*



The Vienna Philharmonic was almost Decca's house orchestra from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s

The **Vienna Philharmonic** is unique among the great orchestras of the world in not having a principal conductor or music director (though in its guise as the orchestra of the State Opera House it does have one, a post almost guaranteed to end in tears). But far from suffering from the lack of a single guiding artistic presence, the VPO has (and always has had) one of the starriest line-ups of guest conductors. To recognise this unique state of affairs and to celebrate the long association between the orchestra and Decca, a 64-CD set has been issued. 'Decca – Wiener Philharmoniker: The Orchestral Edition' is beautifully packaged in gold and resembles the presentation case of a fine bottle of vintage champagne. It has all the sparkle of a *grand cru* but lasts an awful lot longer. (And until January 21, 2015, Presto Classical is offering it at the hugely reduced price of £99 – exactly the same price, as it happens, as a bottle of 2005 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs.)

All the great names are here – Krauss, Walter, Knappertsbusch, Solti, Karajan, Abbado, Ashkenazy, Mehta, Maazel, Kertész, Böhm – but so are quite a few who run the risk of slipping below the musical horizon, conductors such as Carl Schuricht, Horst Stein, Karl Münchinger and Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt. The Vienna Philharmonic during the Decca period (roughly the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s) never wandered far from the central repertoire – you could argue that its repertoire was pretty safe (though interestingly, before the war, it embraced a vast amount of new music) or simply that it felt its job was to be guardian of the core Western classical canon and of its own tradition. Whatever the case, the playing on these discs reveals a remarkable consistency of style, even over a number of decades when the personnel must have changed almost completely. A conductor might imprint his personality but the Vienna style is always there.

There's a lot of music here, and along the way we have complete Beethoven, Brahms and Bruckner symphony cycles – for a change it's fascinating to have the *orchestra* as the single consistent factor, rather than the *conductor*. And the cycles have been chosen well, and thought-provokingly. Take the Beethoven: Monteux in Nos 1 and 6; Schmidt-Isserstedt in Nos 2, 4 and 9; Erich Kleiber in No 3, Solti in Nos 5 and 7 and Abbado in No 8. In many ways these are no-nonsense, 'straight' Beethoven performances but what a cycle they add up to. I loved Monteux's *Pastoral*, Kleiber *père*'s *Eroica* and, not having heard it in years, the Schmidt-Isserstedt *Choral*. A similar wisdom informs the other two cycles, with some gems along the way – Böhm's incomparable Bruckner Fourth, for example. Elegance, exquisite phrasing, beauty of string tone and lovely wind-playing, bite when needed and a real sense of commitment (and, given that nearly all of these would have been studio sessions not necessarily linked to concerts, that's quite a feat): all these qualities shine out from every disc.

There are a few duplications, always for good reason: two Dvořák *New Worlds*, one from Kondrashin (magnificent) and one from Kertész (highly energetic), and two versions of *Das Lied von der Erde* – the classic under Bruno Walter and Leonard Bernstein's with two male soloists. Both Lisa Della Casa and Kiri Te Kanawa give us the *Four Last Songs*, and many of the waltzes and polkas from the Strauss family are doubled, even tripled up – and these discs are where the orchestra is heard at its most relaxed and suave (conductors here include Krauss, Knappertsbusch, Boskovsky and Krips). There are not many surprises when it comes to repertoire: the most unusual pieces are the Gottfried von Einem *Philadelphia* Symphony and Kurt Leimer's Piano Concerto. Franz Schmidt's Fourth Symphony receives a wonderful performance under Zubin Mehta, who also supplies some very exciting Mahler (Symphony No 2), Bruckner (No 9) and Brahms (No 1).

One could argue that the Solti *Ring* was the making of the conductor and he features large here: I must admit not to having been a huge fan but there are some very fine performances among these discs – the Mendelssohn *Italian* Symphony is a treat, as is Schubert's *Great* C major. His Schumann (Nos 1 and 2) is exciting but quite hard-driven, though the *Siegfried Idyll* (subject to much speculation about who actually conducted it) is heavenly. I've always, unfashionably, enjoyed his high-octane Vienna Verdi Requiem with a superb line-up of soloists – Sutherland, Horne, Pavarotti and Talvela – definitely Verdi's greatest opera on this showing (or certainly his most exciting!).

A mention, too, of the genius of Decca's producers and engineers, and for their mastery of Vienna's Sofiensaal in harnessing one of the loveliest acoustics for recording. It's easy to take for granted the naturalness and luminosity of the sound Decca achieved and thanks go to Gordon Parry, James Brown, James Lock, Colin Moorfoot and their colleagues.

It's a magnificent reissue, with fascinating notes by a trio of Decca producers, a history of Decca and the VPO, and the story of the association from Decca's current MD, Paul Moseley, and his colleague Raymond McGill. The booklet is full of detail, though unless you look at the accompanying record sleeves you'd never learn any of the conductors' first names.



Lorin Maazel in Vienna and Cleveland: brilliant but infuriatingly inconsistent

**Lorin Maazel**, who died in July, features in the VPO set in Tchaikovsky (a truly wonderful reading of the Third Suite) and Sibelius but is also the subject of a 19-CD set from Decca focusing on his tenure in Cleveland. He was always a difficult conductor to assess: in the space of a single concert he could deliver a performance of shattering intensity, insight and accomplishment and then turn in something so unengaged and 'surface' that it was hard to reconcile the two approaches. He served as Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra from 1972 to 1982, during which time he recorded for both CBS (now Sony Classical) and Decca. The repertoire here is mainly French and Russian, with some Gershwin and Brahms too.

When Maazel took up the reins in Cleveland, George Szell had been in charge from 1946 until his death in 1970 (Boulez had served two years as Music Adviser in the interim). Szell had created an ensemble second to none and the orchestra still bears his imprint all these years later – precision of ensemble, absolute unanimity of attack, depth of sound and the ability to step up to a new level between rehearsal and performance. In some ways, Maazel's interpretative style came from the same school. Take the four Brahms symphonies, recorded in 1975 and '76 – and which, incidentally, are also available on a two-disc Australian Eloquence set. They're suave and really beautifully played (tellingly, the First, which Welser-Möst gave with the Clevelanders at the BBC Proms this year, was clearly of the same pedigree). What I found lacking was a willingness to vary the tempi and allow for some give and take; it all sounds rather strait-laced.

Ravishing playing and vivid colour characterise the French and Russian repertoire (including Debussy's *La mer*, *Nocturnes*, *Ibéria* and *Jeux*, Ravel's *Daphnis*, Franck's Symphony and Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony and complete *Romeo and Juliet*), while wonderfully vibrant rhythmic life energises Maazel's Gershwin (*Porgy and Bess*, the *Cuban Overture*, *An American in Paris* and *Rhapsody in Blue*, with Ivan Davis).

An Australian Eloquence twofer gathers together Maazel's Decca recordings of **Richard Strauss** tone-poems made with the Vienna Philharmonic between 1964 and '69, therefore before his Cleveland tenure. They're rather softer-grained than his later versions for RCA, and rather lovely. And it's good to have a *Don Quixote* recorded with orchestral principals rather than starry soloists: Emanuel Brabec is a particularly thoughtful Quixote. Brabec also features in the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* suite alongside pianist Friedrich Gulda (ridiculously forward in the balance) and violinist Willi Boskovsky. It's charmingly lifted off the page, almost like chamber music, though without the elegance that Beecham brought to this score. *Don Juan*, *Macbeth*, *Tod und Verklärung* and the First Waltz Sequence from *Der Rosenkavalier* complete the release – and with the VPO on board, things could hardly go wrong.

Nor could things go wrong with **Vladimir Ashkenazy** as the central figure in Decca's 'Rachmaninov – The Complete Works' set (32 CDs on offer from Presto at £49). One of Ashkenazy's first projects as conductor was the complete symphonies with the Concertgebouw Orchestra: fabulous recordings that have rarely been bettered, and they still sound glorious. As pianist he supplies most of the solo works as well as partnering Elisabeth Söderström in the songs (some rather dramatically transposed!). His feeling for this music goes deep and gives the set a wonderful consistency. When it comes to the piano concertos, it's more complete than complete, as we have the classic Ashkenazy/LSO/Previn cycle as well as four other major versions from Byron Janis (No 1), Sviatoslav Richter (No 2), Martha Argerich (No 3) and Zoltán Kocsis (No 4) in addition to the composer's first thoughts in Nos 1 and 4 from Alexander Ghindin with Ashkenazy conducting the Helsinki PO (an acquisition from Ondine). It's easy to forget the breadth of Rachmaninov's output and also what a masterly orchestrator he was. (A nice extra, depending on your view of Ampico piano rolls, is the inclusion of Rachmaninov's own recordings of a selection of solo works.) A really rewarding collection and a real bargain.

A quick mention for a Brilliant Classics reissue (from Arte Nova) of the five **Beethoven** piano concertos, *Choral Fantasy* and *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* from the Tonhalle Orchestra under David Zinman with Yefim Brofman the pianist. If you enjoyed Zinman's survey of the symphonies, you'll know what to expect – light on its toes, with plenty of bite and attack, loads of detail, fabulous wind-playing and evidence of much thought shining from every phrase. And it's all so *musical*! For £8.20 (from Presto Classical) you'd be daft not to… G

## THE RECORDINGS

**Vienna Philharmonic** The Orchestral Edition
Decca Ⓢ (64 discs) 478 6756
**Lorin Maazel** The Cleveland Years
Decca Ⓢ ⑲ 478 7779DB20
**R Strauss** VPO / Maazel
Australian Eloquence Ⓜ ② 480 8948
**Rachmaninov** The Complete Works
Decca Ⓢ (32 discs) 478 6765DB32
**Beethoven** Bronfman; Tonhalle / Zinman
Brilliant Classics Ⓢ ③ 94856

PHOTOGRAPHY: FAYER; WIEN/DG, DECCA

# Opera



## Guy Rickards on Hartmann's operatic 'scenes from youth':

*'Hartmann's opera is viscerally powerful, a fast-paced attack on tyranny and its impact on ordinary people'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 102



## Richard Lawrence reviews the Royal Opera's Don Giovanni:

*'The split-level set is perfect both for social differentiation and for concealment'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 105

## Berg

**Lulu** (three-act version, compl Friedrich Cerha)
**Barbara Hannigan** *sop* ..... **Lulu**
**Dietrich Henschel** *bar* ..... **Dr Schön/Jack the Ripper**
**Charles Workman** *ten* ..... **Alwa**
**Natascha Petrinsky** *mez* ..... **Countess Geschwitz**
**Tom Randle** *ten* ..... **Painter/Negro**
**Pavlo Hunka** *bass-bar* ..... **Schigolch**
**Frances Bourne** *mez* ..... **Wardrobe Mistress/High School Boy/Groom**
**Ivan Ludlow** *bar* ..... **Animal Tamer/Athlete**
**La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra / Paul Daniel**
*Stage director* **Krzysztof Warlikowski**
*Video director* **Myriam Hoyer**
Bel Air Classiques Ⓕ ② DVD BAC109
(3h 14' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)



It's only right that any performance of *Lulu* should revolve around its protagonist. But the way that the Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan dominates Krzysztof Warlikowski's nightmarish Brussels staging of Berg's great unfinished masterpiece is nevertheless remarkable. Tall, slender and chameleonic, she stalks the stage compellingly – often in a state of undress, by turns shockingly sexual and numbly asexual, cultivated and animalistic. The voice itself is remarkably clear and clean: not the most sensuous instrument, perhaps, but one that is used with great intelligence and accuracy.

She moves hypnotically, too, and with a balletic grace. Indeed, the fact that Hannigan herself can float around *en pointe* no doubt helped dictate the fact that the powerfully disturbing image of the broken ballerina plays such a role throughout the production. In one of many extended unaccompanied prologues and postludes introduced by Warlikowski, we watch a ballerina go through a breakdown for a whole five minutes.

These directorial additions, intriguing enough first time around, soon pall though, and they are perhaps symptomatic of a production that piles on decadence and psychological symbols rather too indiscriminately. There are times when the camera struggles to keep up, and when the stage feels cluttered and the action unnecessarily diluted. That said, Małgorzata Szczęśniak's designs are imaginative. The costumes – beyond Lulu's multiple outfits – have a deeply unsettling, over-the-top, dystopian feel to them. The set is effectively disorientating too, made up of an imposing pair of escalators on one side, a moveable glass box on the other; curtains are used to emphasise multiple layers of theatricality. The production is at its best, though, when everything is stripped away, and the final 10 minutes are as gripping and shocking as they should be.

Hannigan is also well supported by the rest of the cast. Natascha Petrinsky is a handsome, moving Geschwitz. Dietrich Henschel's gruff, dry voice seems only to add to his threatening Dr Schön. Tom Randle is impressive as the painter. Very impressive, too, are the orchestra and Paul Daniel, who is particularly adept at finding the score's drama and beauty. It's Hannigan, though, who makes this release so irresistibly watchable.

**Hugo Shirley**

## Bizet

**Carmen**
**Vesselina Kasarova** *mez* ..... **Carmen**
**Jonas Kaufmann** *ten* ..... **Don José**
**Michele Pertusi** *bass-bar* ..... **Escamillo**
**Isabel Rey** *sop* ..... **Micaëla**
**Sen Guo** *sop* ..... **Frasquita**
**Judith Schmid** *mez* ..... **Mercédès**
**Gabriel Bermúdez** *bar* ..... **Dancairo**
**Javier Camarena** *ten* ..... **Remendado**
**Morgan Moody** *bass* ..... **Zuniga**
**Krešimir Stražanac** *bar* ..... **Moralès**
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Zurich Opera House / Franz Welser-Möst**
*Stage director* **Matthias Hartmann**
*Video director* **Felix Breisach**
Decca Ⓕ DVD 074 3881DH; Ⓕ Blu-ray 074 3882DH
(166' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live 2008



There's no shortage of good filmed versions of *Carmen* and one of the best, from Covent Garden, like this one, is on Decca and stars Jonas Kaufmann. But that earlier version also in Anna Caterina Antonacci features a Carmen a great deal more convincing than Vesselina Kasarova. The Bulgarian mezzo is a charismatic singer but her fruity, characterful mezzo has increasingly become something of an acquired taste (this performance was filmed as far back as 2008). Here, dressed as a '50s housewife, she turns in a performance that is never convincing: her seductiveness is bizarrely forced and aggressive; her singing is lumpy and full of scrunching gear changes.

No one, though, is helped by a tepid production that never seems to settle. We could be anywhere in the second half of the 20th century. Volker Hintermeier's set is largely simple, featuring minimal scenery on a circular platform that keeps the action penned in. The work is performed with the Guiraud recitative but several of Hartmann's touches seem to want to emphasise its *opéra comique* heritage: a model dog with mechanical tail downstage in Act 1 is but one not-so-*comique* miscalculation in this regard. Much of the rest of it has a strangely jolly, amateurish feel to it, the over-directed, unnatural-feeling crowd scenes in particular.

Kaufmann's Don José is held back by an unconvincing characterisation that sees him having to turn from shy, bespectacled nerd into murderer. He sings magnificently, though, despite some moments of self-indulgence, and throws everything into the final scene. Michele Pertusi's Escamillo is physically imposing but the voice lacks swagger. Isabel Rey presents a rather mature, slightly predatory Micaëla, her voice short on lyrical flexibility and bloom.

Franz Welser-Möst conducts with little warmth or sensuousness, marching far too efficiently through much of the faster

music. For something updated, I'd stick with Béatrice Uria-Monzon and Roberto Alagna in Calixto Bieito's infinitely edgier, sexier Barcelona production; for something more traditional, the Royal Opera's version remains a safe bet.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Royal Op, Pappano (10/08) (DECC)*

*DVD 074 3312DH; Blu-ray 074 3313DH*

*Liceu, Piollet (1/12) (CMAJ) DVD 707308; Blu-ray 707404*

## Borodin

**Prince Igor**

**Ildar Abdrazakov** *bass* ..... **Igor**
**Oksana Dyka** *sop* ..... **Yaroslavna**
**Sergey Semishkur** *ten* ..... **Vladimir**
**Mikhail Petrenko** *bass* ..... **Galitsky**
**Štefan Kocán** *bass* ..... **Konchak**
**Anita Rachvelishvili** *mez* ..... **Konchakovna**
**Mikhail Vekua** *ten* ..... **Ovlur**
**Vladimir Ognovenko** *bass* ..... **Skula**
**Andrey Popov** *ten* ..... **Eroshka**
**Barbara Dever** *mez* ..... **Nurse**
**Kiri Deonarine** *sop* ..... **Polovtsian Maiden**
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, New York / Gianandrea Noseda**
*Stage director* **Dmitri Tcherniakov**
*Video director* **Gary Halvorson**
DG Ⓕ ② DVD 073 5146GH2; Ⓕ Blu-ray 073 5149GH (3h 12' + 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live 2014
Extras: Backstage at the Met with Ildar Abdrazakov, Dmitri Tcherniakov and Others




Compared to the task of sorting a performing version of Borodin's unfinished 1869-87 opera, choosing an edition of a Bruckner symphony is a stroll. The present 'new' edition – by conductor Noseda and stage director Tcherniakov – pulls a few old rabbits from the hat. The composer's putative Act 3 – a return to the Polovtsian camp – is effectively ditched (although no one told the synopsis writer that the vital confrontation trio Konchakovna/Vladimir/Igor has been kept and transferred to this Act 3), the main Polovtsi act (Act 2, the one that everyone knows a bit because of the famous choral dances) is now Act 1 and the whole ends with some apparently *echt*-Borodin 'flood' music, an event the synopsis omits, and the staging seems uncertain whether we're talking Noah-style earth cleansing or post-traumatic rebuilding.

The result is attractive and gripping because the production knows what it wants to see (personal psychodrama rather than *Kismet*-style pseudo-orientalism) and hear (Borodin rather than Rimsky or Glazunov filler, so no overture for starters). The opera has become the Odyssey-like tale of Igor's mental and physical return from a war at least as dubious as that of Troy, and his wife Yaroslavna's Penelope-like resistance to her politically ambitious and lustful brother's attempts to subvert the kingdom. Both Ildar Abdrazakov, onstage for the whole of the first half, and Oksana Dyka inhabit these roles with vocal agility and, in their acting, a refreshing lack of the old-fashioned hamminess that used to pass for charisma in 19th-century Russian opera. A modicum of the last is retained by Mikhail Petrenko's Galitsky – real or pantomime villain? The production seems unsure. It takes a clearer line with the Polovtsian royals – Štefan Kocán's smiling Mao of a Khan Konchak and Anita Rachvelishvili as his sexy daughter.

Moving the costuming forwards in time to be at least contemporary with the opera's creation helps to declick the story of clichéd visual solutions, as do video close-ups of Igor and his soldiers suffering in bloodied defeat and editing by sudden snap blackouts. Noseda conducts with that light (but never undramatic) fluency that seems to come naturally to Italian maestros in the Russian classics. The company play and sing well and the filming does them justice. Strongly recommended.

**Mike Ashman**

## Glass

**Spuren der Verirrten (The Lost)**

**Soloists and Choruses of the Landestheater Linz; Bruckner Orchestra, Linz / Dennis Russell Davies**
*Stage director* **David Pountney**
*Video director* **Felix Breisach**
Orange Mountain Music Ⓑ ② OMM0097; Ⓕ DVD DVDOMM5008 (165' • DDD • NTSC • 4:3 • 0 • s)
Recorded live, April 12, 2013
Bonus feature: Making of *The Lost*




It isn't every day that an opera house opens its doors for the first time. Hardly surprising, then, that the impressive new Landestheater Linz should aim high for its opening event in April 2013 by commissioning a new opera by Philip Glass, and assembling for this purpose a stellar creative team that included Rainer Mennicken (libretto), David Pountney (stage direction) and Amir Hosseinpour (choreography) alongside conductor Dennis Russell Davies and the Bruckner Orchester Linz. The result, a large-scale three-act opera, is captured here on both disc and DVD. Based on a play by Peter Handke, *The Lost* is an ambitious attempt to synthesise old and new by combining music, drama, dance and ballet with more recent multimedia forms, such as video and film on a grand scale.

The result is a kind of postmodern *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The plot (such as it is) includes a narrator who emerges from the auditorium at the beginning of the opera and whose role only becomes clear at the end, a Jerry Springer-style talk show fracas acted out onstage and projected on to a large video wall, world war and its post-apocalyptic consequence, a naked dancer, a number of biblical, mythological and fictional characters, and a large cast of children, actors and extras who drift in and out of the action at various times.

At one point in Act 3, the Protagonist (sung by Peter Pertusini) proclaims 'Ich bin verloren / Wir sind verloren' ('I am lost / We are all lost'), and by this stage it would be difficult not to disagree. *Spuren der Verirrten* is a complex, multilayered, diffuse, bewildering and occasionally frustrating opera. The sense of confusion appears to permeate the entire production, and Glass cuts a rather isolated figure in the accompanying 'making of' bonus film on the DVD, which relays the cast's trials and tribulations in the countdown to the first performance.

It would be easy, however, to emphasise the flaws in a project of such grand designs; but that would be to diminish a work that has moments of genuine creativity. The choreography is both impressively conceived by Hosseinpour and brilliantly executed by his dance ensemble, and the ending presents a clever theatrical reversal by placing the entire orchestra onstage and the cast miming their performance in the pit. Glass is also forced out of his comfort zone at times, such as in Act 2, which features an improvisational trio of drum kit, bass guitar and oboe, but nevertheless reverts to type for the rousing final grand chorus. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Handel

**Faramondo**

**Emily Fons** *mez* ..... **Faramondo**
**Anna Devin** *sop* ..... **Clotilde**
**Anna Starushkevych** *mez* ..... **Rosimonda**
**Njål Sparbo** *bass* ..... **Gustavo**
**Maarten Engeltjes** *counterten* ..... **Adolfo**
**Christopher Lowrey** *counterten* ..... **Gernando**
**Edward Grint** *bar* ..... **Teobaldo**
**Iryna Dziashko** *sop* ..... **Childerico**
**Göttingen Festival Orchestra / Laurence Cummings**
Accent Ⓕ ③ ACC26402 (176' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Göttingen International Handel Festival, June 2, 2014

PHOTOGRAPHY: CREDIT INFORMATION TO BE ADVISED




Nowadays it seems difficult to comprehend why *Faramondo* (1738) was a marginally stronger success than its close contemporary flop *Serse*. Apostolo Zeno's libretto concerns a conflict between the fifth-century Cimbri and Franks, and in a nutshell conveys Faramondo as the apogee of a moral hero who triumphs over his thorny adversities. The details of the plot are very complicated, so unwary listeners might be misled by the booklet's sloppy printing of the English synopsis from *Siroe*.

Laurence Cummings and his expert Göttingen Festival Orchestra produce a fine account of this undervalued opera, with varied orchestral subtleties and a sure mastery of Handelian style in this fully staged production recorded live last June. Accordingly, there's stage noise, audience applause and all the minor flaws one encounters in a real theatrical performance, but the onstage noise does not obscure an elegantly rounded performance of Handel's fine overture. Diego Fasolis's all-star cast benefits from studio conditions (Virgin) but Cummings's talented company truly inhabit their characters. The title-hero is sung masterfully by Emily Fons: the lovely cavatina 'Sì, tornerò a morir' has intimate sensitivity (matched by the *pianissimo* strings, sweet oboes and exemplary continuo realisation), and there is a thrilling synergy between her impactful singing and the orchestra's momentum in the climactic 'Voglio che sia l'indegno'. Anna Devin has steel and style in equal measure in Clotilde's 'Conoscerò, se brami'; her character's seductive side is revealed in 'Mi parto lieta sulla tua fede', whereas her tempestuous 'Combattuta da due venti' brings the house down before Handel's ritornello has chance to finish. Rosimonda's indignant repulsion of Gernando's unwelcome ardour is sung with entertaining sarcasm by Anna Starushkevych ('Sì, l'intendesti, sì'). Christopher Lowrey sings Gernando's spiteful 'Voglio che mora, sì' with dastardly glee, Njål Sparbo's hot-headed tyrant Gustavo clearly has anger-management issues in the visceral 'Sol la brama di vendetta', and Maarten Engeltjes sings Adolfo's 'Se a' piedi tuoi morrò' in a sincerely heartfelt way that can only be created in a contextual performance (Philippe Jaroussky is merely pleasant in this aria for Fasolis). For the past 15 years Göttingen and NDR have developed a strong tradition of making stimulating live recordings of Handel operas but most of these were not distributed, so it is excellent progress that dedicated efforts like this are going to be widely available. **David Vickers**

*Selected comparison:*
*Fasolis (7/09) (VIRG) 216611-2*

## KA Hartmann

**Simplicius Simplicissimus**
**Juliane Banse** *sop* ..... **Simplicius**
**Will Hartmann** *ten* ..... **Hermit**
**Peter Marsch** *ten* ..... **Governor**
**Ashley Holland** *bar* ..... **Landsknecht**
**Michael Eder** *bass* ..... **Captain**
**Harry Peeters** *spkr* ..... **Speaker**
**Netherlands Radio Chorus and Philharmonic Orchestra / Markus Stenz**
Challenge Classics Ⓕ ② SACD CC72637
(85' • DDD/DSD • T)




The four recordings of Hartmann's second opera between them present three different versions of the work. This latest issue uses the revised version of 1956-57, *Simplicius Simplicissimus* (subtitled 'Three Scenes from his Youth'), as did Heinz Fricke's 1985 recording on Wergo. The two others were released to mark Hartmann's centenary in 2005. ArtHaus's DVD conducted by Kwamé Ryan (1/08) is of the 1934-35 original, *Der Simplicius Simplicissimus Jugend*, structured in three acts and more scenes. BR-Klassik's used Wilfried Hiller's and Robert Klimesch's reconstruction of the 1948 premiere, which included the 1939 Overture in homage to Prokofiev retained in 1957 (featured in Philip Clark's Specialist's Guide to Hartmann, 4/13).

Make no mistake, whichever version you prefer, this is no frothy confection derived from Grimmelshausen's epic novel set in the time of the Thirty Years War such as that served up in the operetta by Johann Strauss (11/00, 7/03). Hartmann's opera is viscerally powerful, a fast-paced attack on the tyranny and its deleterious impact on society and ordinary people. Hartmann's target was the Third Reich, of course; but the tale of the innocent Simplicius and his encounters with the Landsknecht – menacingly sung here by Ashley Holland – who exploits him in scene 1, the Hermit who shelters him in scene 2 and the Governor who appoints him his jester in scene 3 translate as validly to later contexts, whether Pol Pot's Cambodia, the tribal genocides in Rwanda and Darfur or ISIL's barbarism happening now.

Julianne Banse possesses a purity of tone to match Helen Donath back in 1985, and a dramatic sensibility that contends with Claudia Mahnke (ArtHaus) or Camilla Nylund (BR-Klassik). Will Hartmann reprises the Hermit with fine feeling but the cast as a whole is excellent. Wergo's set is currently unavailable but would be disadvantaged in terms of sound and polish by Stenz's Netherlands Radio production. True, Wergo's documentation was more valuable but frustratingly neither it nor Challenge Classics includes an English translation of the libretto. This is my only quibble of the new recording, however, which is the one to have. **Guy Rickards**

*Selected comparison:*
*Bavarian RSO, Fricke (11/95) (WERG) WER 6259-2*

## Hasse

**Marc' Antonio e Cleopatra**
**Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli** *sop* ..... **Cleopatra**
**Vivica Genaux** *mez* ..... **Mark Antony**
**Le Musiche Nove / Claudio Osele**
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ ② 88883 72187-2
(90' • DDD)




Gender-bending, sometimes with an element of titillation, was a commonplace of Baroque opera. When Johann Adolf Hasse's serenata was staged on a country estate near Naples in 1725, the elite audience would not have batted an eyelid that the role of Cleopatra was taken by the 20-year-old soprano castrato Carlo Broschi, aka Farinelli, and that of Mark Antony by contralto Vittoria Tesi. Both singers would soon be superstars. Savouring their vocal prowess, the newly Italianised Hasse created a score whose melodic allure and deft characterisation – plus its final sycophantic tribute to the ruling Habsburgs – made it an instant hit.

Some of the lyrical arias, especially Mark Antony's final vision of the Elysian Fields, adopt the smooth, clearly articulated melodic style of the emerging *galant* manner. But listening 'blind', you might mistake the more vigorous numbers for Hasse's teacher Alessandro Scarlatti, or even Handel. Cleopatra has the most forceful and memorable music, above all in the tumultuous aria in which she resolves to commit suicide. Understandably, this casting here does not seek to replicate the original gender reversal. Abetted by coruscating (if rather too forwardly recorded) playing from the strings of Le Musiche Nove, Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli, slender but keenly focused of tone, sings with terrific verve and commitment. She nicely catches the mingled ironic



Irresistibly watchable: Barbara Hannigan as Lulu and Dietrich Henschel as Dr Schön in Krzysztof Warlikowski's staging of Berg's opera (review on page 100)

mockery and steely resolve of Cleopatra's character (some way from the sex kitten in Handel's near-contemporary *Giulio Cesare*), bringing a native Italian's relish to the text, in aria and recitative, and using Hasse's coloratura flights to enhance the expression. Mazzulli spins a touchingly pure line, too, in the final aria where Cleopatra faces death with stoic melancholy.

As in Plutarch and Shakespeare, Mark Antony cuts a more passive figure, a nostalgically inclined ageing lover rather than a warrior hero. Sounding uncannily like a countertenor with freely produced top notes, Alaskan mezzo Vivica Genaux is ideally cast as Mark Antony. Tender without mawkishness in his avowals of devotion, Genaux rises thrillingly to the moment where Mark Antony is shaken from elegiac mode to vent his despair at the prospect of Cleopatra's death. Conducted with fire and sensibility, eloquently sung and characterised, this new recording makes a vivid case for a work that helped launch the most spectacular operatic career of the age. **Richard Wigmore**

## Lully

**Amadis**

**Cyril Auvity** *ten*.....**Amadis**
**Judith van Wanroij** *sop*.....**Oriane**
**Ingrid Perruche** *sop*.....**Arcabonne**
**Edwin Crossley-Mercer** *bar*.....**Arcalaüs**
**Benoît Arnould** *bar*.....**Florestan**
**Bénédicte Tauran** *sop*.....**Urgande**
**Hasnaa Bennani** *sop*.....**Corisande**
**Pierrick Boisseau** *bar*.....
.....**Alquif/Ardan Canile/Jailer/Shepherd**
**Reinoud Van Mechelen** *ten*...**Captive/Shepherd/Hero**
**Caroline Weynants** *sop*.....**Follower of Urgande/**
.....**Heroine/Captive/Shepherdess**
**Virginie Thomas** *sop*.....
.....**Shepherdess/Follower of Urgande**
**Namur Chamber Choir; Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset**
Aparté Ⓜ ③ AP094 (165' • DDD • T/t)




Quinault's libretto for *Amadis de Gaule* (1684) adapts a medieval Spanish tale of a hero who loves the British princess Oriane, but they both have to contend with the vengeful assaults of their sorcerous enemies Arcabonne and Arcalaüs, whose brother Ardan Canile was slain by Amadis – although Arcabonne becomes compromised by her hopeless love for the hero who once saved her life anonymously. Christophe Rousset directs from the harpsichord with rhythmical zest and contrasting shades of light and dark, such as the ebbing and flowing contours of tripping solo airs and cheerful choruses in the prologue which compares Louis XIV to a reincarnated Amadis (on account of his chivalry, valour and faithfulness as a lover, obviously).

In Act 1, Judith van Wanroij's agitated Oriane is quick to falsely suspect Amadis of infidelity prior to a bellicose divertissement presenting a knightly tournament (featuring thrilling trumpets and swaggering timpani); but her most breathtaking moment is the centrepiece of Act 4 when Amadis appears to be dead and she yearns to follow him ('Il m'appelle; je le vais suivre'). Two outstanding monologue airs are in Act 2, set in a forest: Ingrid Perruche's histrionic Arcabonne admits her lovesickness for the unknown hero who once saved her life in 'Amour que veux-tu de moi?'; a few scenes later, the title-hero's attempt to conceal his melancholy in the shadows of the trees in 'Bois épais, redouble ton ombre' is sung ardently by Cyril Auvity. Powerful projection better suits Edwin Crossley-Mercer's dark sorcerer Arcalaüs; after he summons his infernal demons to fight Amadis, a divertissement conveys how they fail to

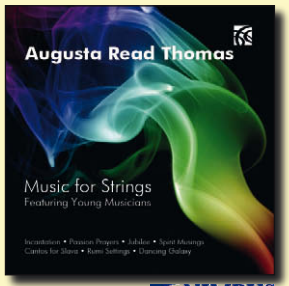
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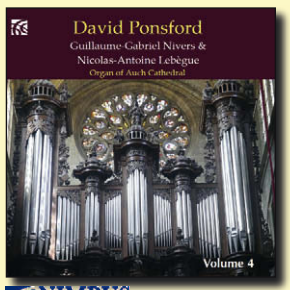

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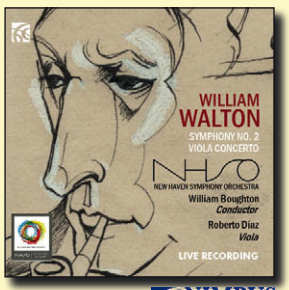

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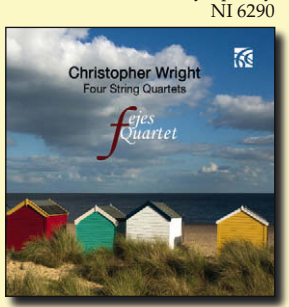

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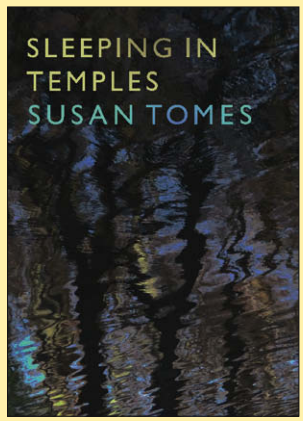

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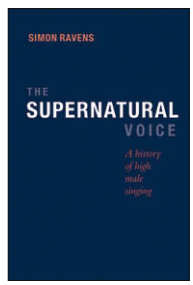
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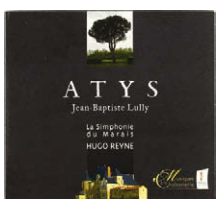
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overcome the hero in combat but then bewitch him by disguising themselves as nymphs and shepherds singing a pastoral hymn to love. A quickfire series of set pieces in Act 3 includes a chorus counterpointing doleful prisoners with their cruel demonic captors ('Ciel! finissez nos peines'), the arrival of the haughty Arcabonne on a dragon (difficult to illustrate in concert) and an astonishing orchestral recitative for the apparition of the ghost of Ardan Canile to prophesy his sister's doom (sung solemnly by Pierrick Boisseau). Les Talens Lyriques' expertly played grand chaconne at the opera's conclusion is another fine testament to Rousset's Lulliste fascination. **David Vickers**

## Lully

**Atys**

**Romain Champion** *ten* ..... **Atys**
**Amaya Dominguez** *mez* ..... **Cybèle**
**Bénédicte Tauran** *sop* ..... **Sangaride**
**Aimery Lefèvre** *bar* ..... **Célénus**
**Matthieu Heim** *bass* ..... **Idas**
**Maud Ryaux** *sop* ..... **Doris**
**Maïlys de Villoutreys** *sop* ..... **Mélisse**
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Based on a tale from Ovid, Quinault's libretto for *Atys* (1676) was the first collaboration with Lully to eschew comic subplots, and its coherent serious tone and unremittingly tragic final act arguably place it close to Racinian drama. The jealous goddess Cybèle summons the Fury Alecto to drive Atys mad, but under the influence of this curse he murders his beloved river nymph Sangaride; upon being restored to sanity, he commits suicide, whereupon the remorseful Cybèle transforms his corpse into a living pine tree that he can be immortalised.

Probably Lully's most-performed opera during his lifetime, in modern times *Atys* owes the revival of its fortunes to William Christie's 1987 recording (Harmonia Mundi). This featured the woodwind player Hugo Reyne, who was inspired by these experiences to establish his own ensemble, La Simphonie du Marais. Their adroitly characterised playing is excellent in the lean overture and gentle gavotte for the followers of Flora during the panegyric prologue; the well-drilled chorus is also superbly effective. Sangaride's short lament that she secretly loves Atys ('Atys est trop heureux!') is performed exquisitely by Bénédicte Tauran; she leads the bittersweet Act 4 trio 'Qu'une premiere amour est belle' exquisitely. Romain Champion's Atys is slightly brawnier than Christie's delicate Guy de Mey but he also sings with charming softness: the famous sleep divertissement at the heart of Act 3 is perhaps the loveliest stretch of music in all of Lully's operas, and this spellbinding performance also features Vincent Lièvre-Picard's sweet high tenor Morphée and the consoling bass voices of Matthieu Heim's Phobétor and Aimery Lefèvre's Phantase. The vivid contrast of the baleful dreams is played with just the right mixture of vigorous refinement. Amaya Dominguez vividly conveys Cybèle's unease ('Espoir sišcher, et si doux'), imperious cruelty (in brief but potent recitatives), and mournfully leads the weeping nymphs and Corybantes in the opera's conclusion. There is no English translation of the libretto but Reyne's conversational essay, a helpful synopsis and lots of illustrations provide plenty of support. **David Vickers**

*Selected comparison:*
*Christie (7/87R) (HARM) HML590 1257/9*

## MacMillan

**Clemency**

**David Kravitz** *bar* ..... **Abraham**
**Michelle Trainor** *sop* ..... **Hagar**
**Christine Abraham** *sop* ..... **Sarah**
**Neal Ferreira, Samuel Levine** *tens*
**David McFerrin** *bar* ..... **Three Travellers**
**Brett Hodgdon** *pf*
**Boston Lyric Opera Orchestra / David Angus**
BIS Ⓕ BIS2129 (59' • DDD)
Recorded live at Artists for Humanity EpiCenter, Boston, February 6, 7 & 13, 2013




Good ideas are everywhere in *Clemency*, though that doesn't mean they've translated into a good listening experience in this live Boston Lyric Opera recording. Whatever success this opera had onstage with audiences is hard to discern here – not unusual with modern works whose scores are closely wedded to stage action. The opera explores the crucial Old Testament moment when aged Abraham and Sarah are visited by three severe, suspicion-inspiring angels announcing the couple's forthcoming birth of Isaac, though Sarah is past childbearing age. We're reminded of that birth's vast implications – felt today in the present Middle East conflicts – with a prequel of sorts: the little-known, 15-minute ballad *Hagars Klage* by the teenage Franz Schubert, characterising the banishment of Abraham's second wife Hagar and their son Ishmael.

Schubert's inclusion would be a great idea were the ballad a viable piece of work. However, it's best heard not as something from a promising composer but as an example of a not particularly exalted 19th-century genre. On each side of the Schubert are Abraham's extended chants, and later, like-minded instrumental interludes in which MacMillan fuses his modern musical manner with that of Arabic music. But they occupy far more real estate than they deserve in this hour-long opera.

The dialogue exchanges between Abraham and Sarah, which are dramatically serviceable in Michael Symmons Roberts's libretto, come off fairly leaden in MacMillan's score, whose main musical interest comes from the imaginative treatment of the Three Travellers predicting Sarah's forthcoming child before moving on to avenge humanity's many wrongs. They sing as a single entity in harmonies voiced to have an effect that's otherworldly, confrontational and full of grim purpose, later developing in myriad musical ways that are the piece's main claim to a dynamic musical narrative.

On this recording the exposed string-writing is indicative of an under-prepared performance. The cast members are far more self-possessed though the vocal lines aren't the sort that account for the singers' full capabilities. **David Patrick Stearns**

## Mozart

**Don Giovanni**

**Mariusz Kwiecień** *bar* ..... **Don Giovanni**
**Malin Byström** *sop* ..... **Donna Anna**
**Véronique Gens** *sop* ..... **Donna Elvira**
**Elizabeth Watts** *sop* ..... **Zerlina**
**Antonio Poli** *ten* ..... **Don Ottavio**
**Alex Esposito** *bass-bar* ..... **Leporello**
**Dawid Kimberg** *bar* ..... **Masetto**
**Alexander Tsymbalyuk** *bass-bar* ..... **Commendatore**
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House / Nicola Luisotti**
*Stage director* **Kasper Holten**
*Video director* **Jonathan Haswell**
Opus Arte Ⓕ DVD OA1145D; Ⓕ Blu-ray OABD7152D
(3h 2' + 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)
Recorded live, February 2014
Extra features: 'Don Giovanni's Women'; Director's Commentary

## Mozart

**Don Giovanni**

**Ildebrando D'Arcangelo** *bass-bar* ..... **Don Giovanni**
**Myrtò Papatanasiu** *sop* ..... **Donna Anna**
**Carmela Remigio** *sop* ..... **Donna Elvira**

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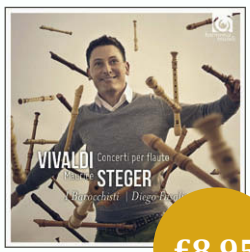
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**Manuela Bisceglie** *sop* ..... **Zerlina**
**Marlin Miller** *ten* ..... **Don Ottavio**
**Andrea Concetti** *bass* ..... **Leporello**
**William Corrò** *bass-bar* ..... **Masetto**
**Enrico Iori** *bass* ..... **Commendatore**
**Coro Lirico Marchigiano 'Vincenzo Bellini'; Fondazione Orchestra Regionale delle Marche / Riccardo Frizza**
*Stage director* **Pier Luigi Pizzi**
*Video director* **Davide Mancini**
C Major Entertainment Ⓕ ② DVD 717408; Ⓕ BD 717504 (174' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live at the Sferisterio Opera Festival, Teatro Lauro Rossi, Macerata, July 23-30, 2009






Here, only five years after Francesca Zambello's production (Opus Arte, 7/09), is a new version of *Don Giovanni* from Covent Garden. It is original, thought-provoking and superbly executed. That I believe it to be based on a false, unsustainable premise does not prevent me from recommending it highly.

Much that is obscure is explained in the conversation between the director and the set designer that overlays a second showing of the entire opera. Whether it should be necessary to resort to a commentary in order to understand what is going on is a question for another time. But the point is this. The Commendatore intervenes to save his daughter after a failed rape attempt by a masked intruder, who then kills him in a duel. Later, Donna Anna realises that her assailant was Don Giovanni; she demands vengeance. You can argue that, since Giovanni shows no further interest in her, he must have been successful: that it was seduction, not rape. What you cannot justify is the proposition that Anna is dissembling throughout, that she is obsessed with Giovanni, even going off with him after hearing Don Ottavio pour out his love for her in 'Dalla sua pace'.

The set designs by Es Devlin and the video designs by Luke Hall are a miracle. The split-level set, divided into compartments, is perfect both for social differentiation and for concealment. Donna Elvira can hear but not see the men in 'Ah taci, ingiusto core', so there's no need for the usual mugging. The names of all Giovanni's conquests are projected – including Anna's. Kasper Holten shows us Giovanni as a man older than usual, lonely, perhaps trying to stave off his fear of death with each new seduction. He is haunted by ghosts from the past; even the Commendatore, who appears silently from time to time, is a ghost rather than a statue. At the end Giovanni is alone, the moralising ensemble sung offstage. If there is enlightenment, it is visited on the others: Anna, Elvira, Zerlina and Leporello all realise that they are emotionally better off elsewhere.

Some of the singing would not pass muster on CD. But the acting is beyond praise, the filming enabling one to appreciate the subtlety of the characters' facial expressions. Mariusz Kwiecień has a dangerous charm and Alex Esposito, more friend than servant, is a perfect foil. Véronique Gens conveys Elvira's genuine love for Giovanni very well. She takes the lower option in 'Mi tradì': a pity (albeit a transposition authorised by Mozart), as the key of D – minor or major – is mainly associated with Anna and the Commendatore. Malin Byström and Elizabeth Watts are very fine, as is the orchestra under Nicola Luisotti.

Pier Luigi Pizzi's 2009 production from Macerata is unconventional in a different way. The main prop is an unmade bed, on which just about everyone cavorts; including Leporello and Elvira, and if you object to that, well, according to the booklet-note you are 'very naive, extremely delicately strung, or extremely strait-laced'. But this is well worth investigating, not least for the conducting of Riccardo Frizza, who is not afraid of accelerating or holding back here and there. The cast led by Ildebrando D'Arcangelo is excellent. Not for your extremely strait-laced maiden aunt, I would agree, but full of sensual pleasure for anyone else.

**Richard Lawrence**

## Mozart

'Desperate Heroines'
**Don Giovanni** – Non mi dir. La finta giardiniera – Crudeli, oh Dio! fermate...Ah dal pianto; Geme la tortorella. **Idomeneo** – Se il padre perdei. **Lucio Silla** – Frà i pensieri. **Mitridate, re di Ponto** – Pallid'ombre. **Le nozze di Figaro** – Deh vieni non tardar; L'ho perduta, me meschina. **Il re pastore** – L'amerò
Sandrine Piau *sop*
Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Naïve Ⓕ V5366 (48' • DDD)




'Desperate heroines' runs the rubric for what Sandrine Piau dubs 'a Mozartian "cartography" of the feminine condition'. Desperation is hardly the word for Susanna's 'Deh vieni' and the shepherd-king Aminta's avowal of eternal love from *Il re pastore*. In the main, though, the recital lives up to its billing as a gallery of Mozartian women *in extremis*, whether recovering from traumatic loss (Ilia, Donna Anna) or facing death (Aspasia in *Mitridate*, Giunia in *Lucio Silla*). Sympathetically partnered by Ivor Bolton and his expert Salzburg players, Piau sings delightfully, with fresh, pellucid tone and keen dramatic understanding. All the more frustrating, then, that the disc runs for a niggardly 48 minutes and that Naïve fails to provide any context for the individual arias.

These gripes aside, Piau brings each of these women, amorous, vulnerable and/or tormented, to vivid life. Her tender shaping of 'Non mi dir' convinces you that Donna Anna does indeed love Don Ottavio; and her ease in coloratura enables the final section to flow at a nimble, graceful *allegretto*. Piau has successfully sung Donna Anna onstage, and she and Naïve have surely missed a trick by not including the imperious 'Or sai chi l'onore'. Elsewhere she finds an extra sensuous warmth in her tone for Susanna's aria, and a darker intensity for Aspasia's Gluckian *ombra* scena and Sandrina's 'mad scene' in *La finta giardiniera*. Perhaps Piau's Barbarina is a touch over-sophisticated – though her little aria, trailing away inconclusively, never works well in isolation. And while she has exactly the right voice for Ilia, Piau makes the Trojan princess too much of a shrinking violet, fading wanly at the end of phrases. That said, many of the numbers here give unalloyed pleasure, not least Sandrina's cooing 'turtle dove' aria and a lovingly phrased 'L'amerò' from *Il re pastore* that comes close to my ideal of Mozartian singing. **Richard Wigmore**

## Porpora

'Il maestro'
**Carlo il Calvo** – Spesso di nubi cinto. **Didone abbandonata** – Già si desta la tempesta. **Ericlea** – Torbido intorno al core. **Ezio** – Se tu la reggi al volo. **Meride e Selinunte** – Con alma intrepida. **Polifemo** – Alto giove. **Semiramide riconosciuta** – Il pastor se torna aprile; Vorrei spiegar l'affanno. Il ritiro – A voi ritorno campagne amene. Il verbo in carne – Distillatevi o cieli. Vulcano – Non lascia chi t'ama tanto
Franco Fagioli *counterten*
Academia Montis Regalis / Alessandro De Marchi
Naïve Ⓕ V5369 (80' • DDD)




Partnered ably by Academia Montis Regalis, Franco Fagioli sings with

fulsome bravado and technical virtuosity in vibrant performances of 12 selections drawn from six different operas (for both male and female characters), a Christmas oratorio and two secular cantatas, all dating from between 1725 and 1748. Dramatic contexts, dates and cities are lacking from the skin-deep booklet, so it is unexplained which of Porpora's two different versions of *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1729 Venice or 1739 Naples) has yielded a couple of arias, but I'm glad to have heard the title-heroine's beguiling 'Il pastor se torna aprile', in which pastoral recorders and horns softly illustrate Metastasio's double simile.

Fagioli regards Porpora's arias as a laboratory for learning, and his verbose preface dwells on the maestro's reputation as the singing teacher of Farinelli and many others. He calls this music 'So emotional, so profound', but his sentiment, personality and projection in the emperor Valentinian's trumpet-festooned 'Se tu la reggi al volo' (Ezio), the turbulent Araspe's 'Già si desta la tempesta' (*Didone abbandonata*), the valorous heroism of Selinunte's 'Con alma intrepida' (*Meride e Selinunte*) and the giddy Acis's love aria 'Nell'attendere il mio bene' (*Polifemo*) are strangely uniform. If sheer flash is all you're after, then look no further than the dazzling vocal cascades in 'Spesso di nubi cinto' from *Carlo il Calvo*, although the vainglorious cadenza isn't Fagioli's finest hour (almost literally). **David Vickers**

## Puccini

**Tosca**

**Emily Magee** *sop* ..... **Tosca**
**Jonas Kaufmann** *ten* ..... **Cavaradossi**
**Thomas Hampson** *bar* ..... **Scarpia**
**Valeriy Murga** *bar* ..... **Angelotti**
**Giuseppe Scorsin** *bass* ..... **Sacristan**
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Zurich Opera House / Paolo Carignani**
*Stage director* **Robert Carsen**
*Video director* **Felix Breisach**
Decca Ⓕ 074 3420DH; Ⓕ 074 3828DH
(124' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live 2009




Puccini's blood-and-thunder thriller is not, traditionally, an opera that has reacted well to directorial intervention. The great achievement of Robert Carsen's Zurich production (filmed in 2009) is that it adds layers of interpretation without undercutting the work's essential drama. Those layers largely involve plenty of meta-theatrical touches, emphasising Tosca's own status as performer. Anthony Ward's set gives glimpses of another proscenium arch set askance upstage; rows of chairs face in that direction in Act 1, the Sacristan picking up *Tosca* programmes left behind by an earlier audience. At the climax of the Te Deum, Tosca is revealed in her own kitschy apotheosis, which blurs the line between art and religion brilliantly; the very end is ambiguous and troubling in the best sense.

It doesn't all work, and Scarpia's first appearance from between columns is unintentionally comic. Elsewhere, the nuts and bolts of the opera's plot perhaps fit a little uneasily with Carsen's more impressionistic take, and there are times when it can feel a touch detached and cerebral. But it's all executed with the director's characteristic flair and style, and is refreshingly thought-provoking.

Part of the reason why it works so well is that the three principals are such good actors, turning in dramatic performances that are full of subtle details. Emily Magee's Tosca is sympathetic and proud, cunning and thoughtful; and although the voice is a little more tense than ideal, she sings with total commitment. Thomas Hampson's civilised *Kavalierbariton* is stretched by the demands of Scarpia and he is reduced to hectoring rather too often. As recompense, though, he brings sly understatement and intelligence to the role elsewhere. Jonas Kaufmann is a terrific Cavaradossi. His voice, dark and baritonal, lacks the *squillo* of some of the best Cavaradossis but it's a subtle, sensitively sung portrayal that matches the production well.

The only slight shame is that Paolo Carignani's conducting rarely rises above the routine, fails to catch fire and is apparently uninterested in finding anything to match Carsen's insights. Still, for a new take on an old warhorse, this release has much to recommend it. **Hugo Shirley**

## Rameau

**Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour**

**Chantal Saton-Jeffery** *sop* ..... **Orthésie/Orie**
**Carolyn Sampson** *sop* ..... **L'Amour/Memphis**
**Blandine Staskiewicz** *mez* ..... **L'Hymen/Egyptian Shepherdess**
**Jennifer Borghi** *mez* ..... **Mirrine**
**Mathias Vidal** *ten* ..... **Un Plaisir/Agéris/Aruéris**
**Reinoud Van Mechelen** *ten* ..... **Osiris/Egyptian Shepherd**
**Tassis Christoyannis** *bass* ..... **Canope**
**Alain Buet** *bass* ..... **High Priest**
**Chorus and Orchestra of Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet**
Glossa Ⓕ ② GCD921629 (114' • DDD)




*The Festivities of Hymen and Cupid* started out as a *ballet-héroïque* in three entrées called *The Gods of Egypt*. With the addition of a Prologue it acquired its present title as an *opéra-ballet*; it was staged at Versailles in 1747 as part of the festivities celebrating the marriage of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV, to a German princess. In the Prologue, Cupid is depressed at the thought of having to submit to Hymen; when the latter arrives and assures Cupid of his support, all is sweetness and light.

Each of the entrées is named after an Egyptian god. The initial hostility in the Prologue finds a counterpart in Osiris. Myrrine, 'Amazone sauvage', warns her queen against the mortals led by Osiris; but when the god arrives and invokes Cupid, Orthésie melts. In the second entrée, the river-god Canope, under the name of Nilée, is in love with the nymph Memphis. When she is about to be sacrificed he returns in his true guise, rebukes priests and populace, and marries her. Finally, Aruéris (Horus), god of the arts, encourages his love Orie – another nymph – to enter the Games over which he presides. Diffident at first, she interrupts the singing competition and wins the prize, *summa cum laude*, which is Aruéris himself. In all three entrées Cupid is referred to or addressed direct.

It should be clear from this synopsis, sketchy though it be, that this is no drama. Like *Les surprises de l'Amour* (Glossa, 12/13) it has much in common with *Les Indes galantes*; very little with *Hippolyte et Aricie*. What it does share with Rameau's glorious *tragédies en musique* is the generous provision of music for ballet: not as divertissements but as part of the action. There are presentations, offerings, celebrations, all wonderful examples of Rameau's inexhaustible invention. Then there are the splendid choruses, including one for double four-part choir plus two soloists when a terrific storm causes the Nile to overflow.

The solo writing ranges from recitative to *da capo* arias; the delightful orchestration includes independent bassoon parts. Apart from a backward harpsichord continuo, the recording is excellent. And, oh yes, so are the singing and playing. **Richard Lawrence**

## Rossini

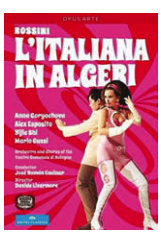
**L'italiana in Algeri**

**Alex Esposito** *bar* ..... **Mustafà**
**Mariangela Sicilia** *sop* ..... **Elvira**



Multicoloured, multimedia mayhem: Davide Livermore's Blake Edwards-inspired staging of Rossini's L'italiana in Algeri in Pesaro

**Raffaella Lupinacci** *mez*.....**Zulma**
**Davide Luciano** *bar*.....**Haly**
**Yijie Shi** *ten*.....**Lindoro**
**Anna Goryachova** *mez*.....**Isabella**
**Mario Cassi** *bar*.....**Taddeo**
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Comunale, Bologna / José Ramón Encinar**
*Stage director* **Davide Livermore**
*Video director* **Tiziano Mancini**
Opus Arte Ⓕ DVD OA1141D; Ⓕ Blu-ray OABD7148D (153' + 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)
Recorded live at the Rossini Opera Festival, Pesaro, August 2013. Extra features: Cast Gallery; The making of *L'italiana in Algeri*




For its 2013 bicentenary production of *L'italiana in Algeri*, Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival assembled a cast and conductor whose realisation of the piece would grace any CD library. One would have looked in vain 30 years ago for a coloratura bass as vocally adept and as theatrically gifted as Alex Esposito. Anna Goryachova is a superlative Isabella, Mario Cassi a suitably downtrodden Taddeo. Only Yijie Shi's rather tight-voiced Lindoro might be said to compare unfavourably with some of the sweeter-voiced *tenori di grazia* of yesteryear.

Unfortunately, this isn't a CD, so unless you are looking for two and a half hours of 1970s-themed, multicoloured, multimedia mayhem you would be advised to steer clear. Turning Mustafà into a drug-dealing, Viagra-popping oil sheikh is not the problem. It's all the nonsense that's going on around him that's so puzzling. *L'italiana in Algeri* has always had its surreal side – the affrighting has always been part of the delighting – but it's also a wonderfully crafted piece musically. Director Davide Livermore claims to recognise Rossini's craft, yet there's scant evidence of this in a staging which breaks the cardinal rule of playing comedy: never act up to the gags.

I don't pretend to recognise all the referencing. To judge by the DVD jacket, there's an Austin Powers theme going on, though the talk in the attendant interviews is all of Blake Edwards, creator of *The Pink Panther*. Playing alongside Livermore's *L'italiana in Algeri* in Pesaro in 2013 was a revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's 1987 production of *L'occasione fa il ladro*. Now there was man who knew a thing or two about staging Rossini.

**Richard Osborne**

## Wagner

**Lohengrin**
**Michael König** *ten*.....**Lohengrin**
**Camilla Nylund** *sop*.....**Elsa**
**Michaela Schuster** *mez*.....**Ortrud**
**Robert Hayward** *bass-bar*.....**Telramund**
**Falk Struckmann** *bass-bar*.....**King Henry**
**Daniel Schmutzhard** *bar*.....**Herald**
**Frankfurt Opera and Museum Chorus and Orchestra / Bertrand de Billy**
Oehms Ⓕ ③ OC946 (3h 34' • DDD)




No sooner has de Billy walked out of the Vienna State Opera in a dispute about cuts in *Lohengrin* than his first recording of the work is released, the latest in Frankfurt's in-house live recording of what looks like becoming a genuinely complete Wagner cycle. As we learned from the Barcelona *Ring* DVDs (Opus Arte) the French conductor is a practical, uneccentric Wagnerian who knows how to build and pace an effective performance. What stand out especially here are balances between stage and pit and chorus and the soloists which allow an exceptional amount of detail through in sometimes

PHOTOGRAPHY: LUCIANO GORYACHOVA

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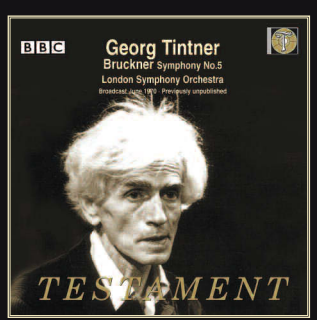

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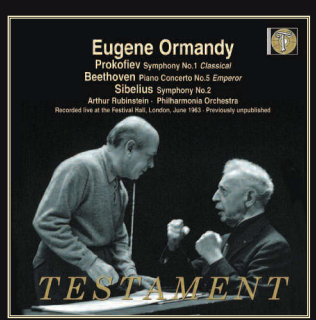

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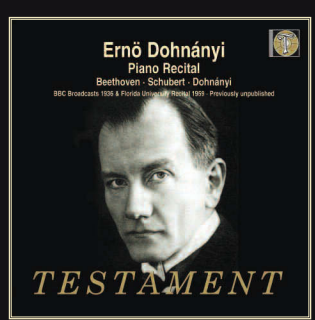

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congested-sounding passages in the outer-act finales. Credit also naturally to the recording for this.

As per normal at this address, the casting is intelligent and original. Nylund is a weightier than is often heard today (cf Kringelborn, Dasch) but clear-as-a-bell Elsa, an instant tonal colour contrast to Schuster's Ortrud, who could be described as less heavy (and certainly less blustery) than might be expected. Hayward is a rather grand, noble Telramund, a credible-sounding regent's guardian rather than a neurotic proto-Macbeth wreck. König, in exceptionally fresh voice for the final scene, is a fluent young knight rather than a pretty-sounding mystic, whose distress at Elsa's fatal curiosity is audibly realised. Together with Falk Struckmann's man-of-the-people King Henry, they make up a fresh-sounding look at a work whose casting can become rather identikit similar. It is this aspect – and Matthias Köhler's chorus, exceptional in projection, colour and accuracy – which gives this new release its distinguishing feature.

If this were the only recording the opera would be well served but competition is fierce at the moment. If you are not fussy about state-of-the-art sound, last year's Orfeo resurrection of a fevered live Karl Böhm performance from 1960s Vienna remains essential, not least for the husband/wife pairing of Walter Berry and Christa Ludwig as the baddies. The Warner Barenboim is absolutely complete, including the officially cut second verse of the Grail Narration. Kempe's EMI set and Sawallisch's Bayreuth one (now Decca) are reliable library versions. Try to hear Erich Kleiber's Danish excerpts and Furtwängler's pre-war Act 3 for the conducting.

**Mike Ashman**

*Selected comparisons:*
*Kempe (2/64R, 2/88R) (EMI) 456465-2 or 973359-2*
*Sawallisch (7/76R, 12/95R) (DECC) 478 5802DMA3*
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*(WARN) 2564 66683-4*
*Böhm (9/13) (ORFE) C862 133D*

## Maria Luigia Borsi

'Italian Soprano Arias'

**Catalani** La Wally – Ebben? Ne andrò lontana **Puccini** La bohème – Donde lieta uscì. Gianni Schicchi – O mio babbino caro. Madama Butterfly – Un bel dì vedremo. La rondine – Chi il bel sogno di Doretta. Suor Angelica – Senza mamma, o bimbo. Turandot – Signore, ascolta! **Respighi** Il tramonto **Verdi** Otello – Era più calmo?; Mia madre aveva...Piangea cantando...Ave Maria

Maria Luigia Borsi *sop*
London Symphony Orchestra / Yves Abel
Naxos Ⓑ 8 573412 (59' • DDD)




It is welcome to have on the Naxos budget label a collection of Italian soprano arias as attractive as this delightful disc. Maria Luigia Borsi is a new name to me, but here is a young, sweet-toned lyric soprano able to float *pianissimos* in the highest register to ravishing effect. The six Puccini arias that take up the greater part of the disc, starting with Butterfly's 'Un bel dì vedremo', are all enchantingly done, including Doretta's aria from the unjustly neglected *La rondine*, with the soprano line going higher and higher in a heavenly way. They end inevitably with 'O mio babbino caro' from *Gianni Schicchi*.

It is good also to have the lovely scena by Respighi, *Il tramonto* ('The Sunset'), atmospherically done, a substantial item of some 15 minutes. Marginally longer still is what I treasure most of all on the disc, the excerpt from Act 4 of Verdi's *Otello*, including the Willow Song leading into the Ave Maria, Desdemona's final words. The performance that Borsi gives is not just ravishingly beautiful but has a dramatic intensity that suggests that this is a role Borsi has made her own onstage. The shading of the repeated cries of 'Salce' in the Willow Song, ever softer, could not be more moving, while at the other end of the dynamic spectrum the agonised A sharp sung *fortissimo* before the Ave Maria is thrillingly precise, without a hint of any upwards scooping. It is luxury casting to have the LSO crisply conducted by Yves Abel.

**Edward Greenfield**

## 'You Mean the World to Me'

**Abraham** Die Blume von Hawaii – Diwanpüppchen[a]. Viktoria und ihr Husar – Reich mir zum Abschied noch einmal die Hände[a] **Benatzky** Im weissen Rössl – It would be wonderful indeed **Heymann** Ein blonder Traum – Irgendwo auf der Welt **Kálmán** Gräfin Maritza – Grüss mir mein Wien **Korngold** Die tote Stadt – Glück, das mir verblieb[a] **Künneke** Die grosse Sünderin **Lehár** Frasquita – My little nest of heavenly blue. Giuditta – Freunde, das Leben ist lebenswert!. Das Land des Lachelns – Je t'ai donné mon coeur; You are my heart's delight. Paganini – Girls were made to love and kiss **May** My song goes round the world **Spoliansky** Das Lied einer Nacht – Heute Nacht oder nie **Stolz** Liebeskommando – Im Traum hast du mir alles erlaubt. Das Lied ist aus – Don't ask me why **Tauber** Der singende Traum – Du bist die Welt für mich

Jonas Kaufmann *ten* [a]Julia Kleiter *sop*
Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra / Jochen Rieder
Sony Classical Ⓕ 88843 08771-2 (67' • DDD • T/t)




The distinctive repertoire was planned by Thomas Voigt – not a trawl through predictable encores but a look at the Berlin decade 1925-35 in operetta and film hits, numbers made famous by the tenors Richard Tauber, Joseph Schmidt and Jan Kiepura. This gives us not only later Lehár but also the still undervalued Kálmán plus Stolz, Hans May, Paul Abraham and a relevant drop-in of the big duet from Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*. There are also bonuses. While the CD under review here has six of the numbers sung in what I'd like to call Tauber-English (plus a further 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz' in French), in order to get the full Jonas you can pay more for a multi-disc version with all numbers in their original German plus DVD of an accompanying concert.

It should be wonderful – and it sometimes is. Kaufmann certainly has the vocal range to deliver both the heroics of Künneke's 'Lied vom Leben des Schrenk' and the close-to-the-mic smooch of Abraham's 'Diwanpüppchen' (in duet with Julia Kleiter). But he sounds at times uncertain of what emotional line to take. Interpreters such as Tauber, or today's Max Raabe, have always made firm decisions about being ironic or just plain raunchy with this material. 'Girls were made to love and kiss' – in the now censored English version of Lehár's *Paganini* showstopper – is a case in point where the 'who am I to interfere with this?' refrain surely should carry some male innuendo. Except phonetically, Kaufmann (recreating Tauber's internationalism) does not always match the saucy cool of the originals in these translated numbers: they're a bit neutral, carefully read from the page.

I imagine the concert versions will be better and rather regret that the whole recital was not taken live. But nobody in this country – where we still get a hundred *Merry Widows* to one *Frasquita* or *Paganini*, and *Viktoria und ihr Husar* and Robert Stolz are still dreams on LP sleeves – should be put off a chance to hear such repertoire so well sung.

**Mike Ashman**

# REPLAY

**Rob Cowan**'s monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## *Russian perspectives*

Four box-sets that have an element of 'completeness' – all from Russian composers, conductors and performers

Familiarity breeds contempt – a simple enough cliché, occasionally justified, but when it comes to recordings, the greater the performance, the more we respond to repeated hearings. One such case is **Sergey Rachmaninov**'s legacy (as pianist) for RCA, now enjoying its third CD outing from RCA itself, a slimline box and nearly 11 hours' worth of listening. Yes, the sound is variable (especially those recordings captured on a horn gramophone) and the repertoire isn't all 'top-notch', but 70-plus years on there's still no recording of the piano concertos and *Paganini* Rhapsody that can seriously rival the composer's own. Ditto his various preludes and other shorter pieces, as well as Schumann's *Carnaval* (with its death-haunted 'Sphinxes'), Chopin's *Funeral March* Sonata, the master's way with numerous morceaux and the wonderful sonata recordings with

> 'There's that extraordinary feeling that the pianist and his instrument are as one'

Fritz Kreisler. Everywhere you sense the presence of a keyboard giant: the thunderous attack, the wonderful delicacy, rhapsodic phrasing that never edges into corny excess, and that extraordinary feeling that the pianist and his instrument are as one. If 'Vladimir Horowitz Live at Carnegie Hall' is the most remarkable set of live piano recordings available, this has to be the greatest single box of piano studio sessions – no contest. And I can't think that any pianist worthy of the name would seriously disagree.

**Tatiana Nikolayeva** might not have authored the 24 magnificent Preludes and Fugues that she plays on a three-CD Melodiya release, but she was chosen by composer Shostakovich to premiere them; and even in the light of selections as recorded by Richter and Shostakovich himself, Nikolayeva's three complete cycles are as yet unrivalled. The first (1962) is out on Doremi, the last (1990) was recorded by Hyperion, and the middle set here (also reissued by Regis), from 1987, and possibly the best of the three, enjoys relatively dry sound that suits the starkly immediate nature of much of the music. By turns playful and profound, contemplative and dramatic, it's a journey very much worth making, and Nikolayeva is your ideal guide. This Melodiya transfer is the one to go for.

Two Melodiya orchestral sets hail from a somewhat earlier vintage. **Yevgeny Svetlanov**'s cycle of Tchaikovsky symphonies with the State Academic Symphony Orchestra was recorded in 1967. Speaking in general terms it stands up fairly well even in the light of its best successors (Pletnev on DG and Pentatone, Rozhdestvensky on Melodiya). Highlights include a rustic Second (bracing *Scherzo*, thrilling finale), a Third that features an especially emotive *Andante elegiaco*, an extremely heated Fourth (the finale fast-paced like Mravinsky's, if less sleek) and a *Manfred* Symphony that for depth of understanding and fine execution still compares with the very best. Good as they are, the less distinguished recordings in the cycle (Nos 1, 5 and 6) aren't exactly CD classics. But in spite of occasionally raucous sound, I'd say that **Gennadi Rozhdestvensky**'s Prokofiev symphony series (recorded 1965-67) probably is. OK, the Fifth has its noteworthy rivals (Karajan, Paavo Järvi, even Kletzki and Ansermet), and with No 6 there's the incomparable Mravinsky, but in the 'wild card' Symphonies Nos 2 and 3, no one quite matches Rozhdestvensky for animal magnetism, the brass at the close of the Second's first movement like a bunch of braying banshees, the marching climax of the theme and variations second movement shockingly invasive. And there's the pitch-black processional that closes the Third, like a menacing death march. By contrast, the Fourth's first movement is energetic and big-hearted, while the Seventh epitomises the tender and human aspects of Prokofiev's later phase, music charged with a peculiarly bittersweet brand of exuberance. All four of these works are conducted by Rozhdestvensky with a comprehensive understanding of their very different personalities, and with a chipper, well-played *Classical* Symphony to open the cycle, I wouldn't miss this set for the world.

### THE RECORDINGS



**Various cpsrs** 'Rachmaninov: Complete RCA Recordings'
**Rachmaninov** *pf* et al
RCA Ⓢ ⑩ 88843 07392-2



**Shostakovich**
24 Preludes and Fugues
**Tatiana Nikolayeva** *pf*
Melodiya Ⓑ ③ MELCD100 2269



**Tchaikovsky** Symphonies Nos 1-6 **State Academic SO / Evgeny Svetlanov**
Melodiya Ⓢ ⑤ MELCD100 2157



**Prokofiev** Symphonies Nos 1-7 **Moscow Radio SO / Gennadi Rozhdestvensky**
Melodiya Ⓜ ③ MELCD100 1797



Sergey Rachmaninov: a keyboard giant

## Honouring Rameau in style

One of the happiest CD releases commemorating Jean-Philippe Rameau in this the 250th year since his death also celebrates the pianist **Marcelle Meyer**, immortalised not only in her many recordings but also in Jacques-Emile Blanche's 1922 painting of her posed in the company of Jean Cocteau and Les Six, for whom she was something of a muse. Meyer's Rameau recordings of 1953 for Les Discophiles Française were first reissued (by EMI, now Warner) as a French EMI Références LP double pack; then in the context of the CD set 'Les introuvables de Marcelle Meyer, Vol 2' and as a 'Les rarissimes' CD double pack. It's a generous collection, with deft, elegant performances of the *Premier livre de pièces de clavecin*, as well as suites in E minor, D major and A minor (from the *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*) and *Pièces en concert*. Also included are 11 earlier recordings of pieces also featured in the 1953 collection – shellac alternatives well transferred, conceptually similar but generally lighter and more subtly textured. A good one to compare is the 'Gavotte et doubles' from *Nouvelles suites* (CD 2, track 2 [1953] and track 22 [1946]), where, although the two performances are similarly shaped, there's rather more light and shade in the earlier version. Most of Rameau's best-known pieces are included ('Les cyclopes', 'Le rappel des oiseaux', 'L'Egyptienne', etc). A superb collection.

### THE RECORDING




**Rameau** Keyboard works
**Marcelle Meyer** *pf*
Erato Ⓢ ② 2564 62579-9

## Classic Mozart

A Sony Masters four-CD set gathering of the augmented **Budapest Quartet**'s early 1950s recordings of Mozart's complete string quintets and 'Haydn' quartets revisits a touchingly expressive manner of string playing that although not quite a thing of the past is certainly rare in this more ascetic interpretative climate.

The quintets (with viola player Milton Katims performing in five of them, and Walter Trampler in the First) were previously released by Sony Classical, with a third disc devoted to stereo recordings of the Clarinet Quintet (David Oppenheim), G minor Piano Quartet (Mieczysław Horszowski) and *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (Julius Levine, double bass). However, on balance I'd say that the current reissue (previously out on a Columbia Legends set), where the quartets feature the superb line-up of Joseph Roisman, Jac Gorodetzky, Boris Kroyt and Mischa Schneider, has the edge. For me, the inevitable litmus test is the E flat major Quartet, K428, where the gathering of voices near the start of the *Andante con moto* must count as one of the most magical moments in the whole chamber-music repertoire. Middle voices are crucial, which is where the Budapesters excel.

Brilliance is another notable attribute, as in the finale of the *Dissonance* Quartet, K465, Roisman fiddling away at his virtuoso best. The quintets are equally distinctive, the Budapest G minor among my trio of favourites (almost level pegging with the Heifetz and Grumiaux-led versions), the *Adagio ma non troppo* pure bliss, while the quietly curling cello that opens K593 like a storybook couldn't have been better judged. Of course there are other ways to play the same repertoire. I'm still eager for Sony to reissue the Juilliards' wonderful 1960s Epic set of the 'Haydn' quartets but even if they did (and fingers crossed), I wouldn't wish to be without these superb performances. The mono sound is warmly blended, the transfers first rate.

### THE RECORDING




**Mozart** String Quintets etc
**Budapest Quartet; Katims; Trampler**
Sony Classical Masters mono
Ⓢ ④ 8884 306531-2

## Follow my Lieder

Pristine Audio's coupling of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and Schubert's *Schwanengesang* in their first-ever electrical recordings is both instructive and musically satisfying. The Schumann had been entrusted to baritone **Hans Duhan**, a big voice, not exactly strong on colour or tonal shading but as was noted in these pages in January 1930, 'manly and free from undue emotionalism'. The darker songs such as 'Die Stadt', 'Am Meer' and 'Der Doppelgänger' come off best, whereas in the lighter ones Duhan is little unyielding. Ferdinand Foll's piano playing is more direct than subtle, but it's a strong reading none the less, and a refreshing change from the preciousness that greets certain modern interpretations. By contrast baritone Thom Denijs's *Dichterliebe* from 1930 (with pianist Enni Denijs-Kruyt) proved something of a revelation, and not only because Denijs phrases each song with such an acute sense of musical poetry.

I may be risking controversy here if I surmise that the great Charles Panzéra studied this recording when he was preparing to perform the piece himself, certainly when he recorded *Dichterliebe* with Alfred Cortot, because at times the similarity between the two singers, and their respective approaches to the work, is quite marked (though Cortot's piano playing is infinitely more expressive). Try the cycle's first two or three songs and I'm sure you'll hear what I mean. Add the fact that Panzéra's singing of French *mélodies* (and of Henri Duparc in particular) leaves a quite different vocal impression and I'm doubly convinced. But it's just a hunch, backed up not by fact but simply by listening. The transfers are in general excellent although in the Schubert cycle some 78 sides were evidently better than others.

### THE RECORDING




**Schubert, Schumann**
Song cycles
**Duhan, Denijs**
Pristine Audio mono
Ⓢ PACO109

PHOTOGRAPHY: RCA/SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

# Books



Caroline Gill reviews the story of our most popular carols:

*'It is undoubtedly an entertaining reference to dip into over Christmas by the fire with a glass of port'*

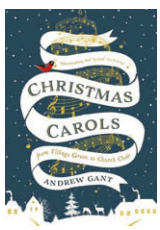


Andrew Mellor reads a Norwegian composer's first biography:

*'One of the characteristics that does leap out is Irgens-Jensen's absolute Norwegian nationality'*

## Christmas Carols

**From Village Green to Church Choir**
**By Andrew Gant**
Profile Books, HB, 224pp, £9.99
ISBN 978-1-781-25352-6




'English Christmas carols are a hotchpotch, like the English themselves,' opens *Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir*. The history of the Christmas carol is a well-trodden story path, with some walked with more scholarly kit on the back than others. For all of them, though, the question is still fairly basic and two-dimensional, and that is to ask what is the history behind the notes on the page of the carols we sing at Christmas. There is a fairly limited selection of those books on the subject, too – in inverse proportion, in fact, to their popularity and the important place they occupy in people's lives.

Perhaps that is the intention of Andrew Gant's slim volume *Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir*. After all, what else could be the point of a history of Christmas carols written by one of the most successful and respected church musicians in the country? Whose own career as organist, composer, university lecturer and writer – all within the sphere of church and choral music – itself forms the sort of erudite hotchpotch that can best inform this kind of examination? *A Cause for Caroling*, the companion volume to Jeremy Summerly's eponymous series on BBC Radio 4 that aired last Christmas, will not be released this Christmas, which leaves the only similar reference the ubiquitous *New Oxford Book of Carols*.

But Gant takes his line of enquiry to a more existential level and examines what it is that makes the carol so magical, rather than simply hovering around the more earthbound issues of history and context. There is plenty of that, to be sure, but the most engaging parts of the book are those that give small nuggets of seemingly unimportant information about a carol or its composer. Witness his account of the life of Robert Pearsall, for example, whose masterly writing of polytextural choral music was embellished by texts he either wrote or translated himself and which came from a skill that was almost entirely self-taught. Gant details a journey that included an early marriage and career in the legal profession, through divorce, emigration and travel, to a final foray into interior design in a ruined medieval castle in Switzerland that conspired to create the magical textures of the version of *In dulci jubilo* most often sung by choirs today.

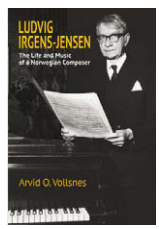
So, to that end, his thesis is not only unexpected and often surprising but welcome: not just musicians are involved, either, but philosophers and choristers as well as pagans and drunks, in this commentary on how various songs, plainsongs, hymns and folksongs evolved from their original shape into a form so refined that their true origins are often hidden. He chronicles this engaging history by way of 22 of the 24 carols contained on the accompanying disc (see page 19) in a way that is spontaneous and engaging, and which actually feels as if it would suit a series of animated lectures better than the two-dimensional position they occupy on the page here, especially in its conjecture that there is still more evolution for the Christmas carol to undergo within what he suggests is the closest that art music has to a folk – or oral – tradition.

While this commentary resides in the tricky area between trade book and academic reference work, and is undoubtedly an entertaining reference to dip into over Christmas by the fire with a glass of port, it nevertheless goes a long way to reclaiming and reidentifying the original germ of the carol – carving out the strands that have in some way gone to reduce its concentrated natural heritage into something more homogenised and sentimental. In the end, though, it is most likely to find its resting place on the shelves of choral directors who will plunder its pages for their Christmas concert programme notes for years to come.

**Caroline Gill**

## Ludvig Irgens-Jensen

**The Life and Music of a Norwegian Composer**
**By Arvid O Vollsnes**
Toccata Press, HB, 368pp, £45
ISBN 978-0-907689-73-7




If you've not heard (or heard of) Ludvig Irgens-Jensen (1894-1969), check out his Passacaglia for orchestra. Because if you don't, you'll be a little in the dark for the 26 pages Arvid Vollsnes dedicates to the piece in his biography. All the more reason, though, is that the Passacaglia is such a useful focal point – not only for us but for Vollsnes too. For newcomers, it unveils the full force of Irgens-Jensen's musical personality while clearly underlining the principles he held so dear: form, counterpoint and a sense of grandeur (arguably unsurpassed in Norwegian music) that comes only from cumulative qualities within the music itself, never from any human association or ego trip. For aficionados, the Passacaglia tantalisingly foregrounds some of the most fascinating (if obvious) 'issues' for a thus-oriented Norwegian composer active in the middle of the 20th century: how to deal with modernism, nationalism, folk material, and reconcile those with a musical worldview that recognised Palestrina and Bach as craftsmen-in-chief.

To some extent Carl Nielsen managed it, and in time Vollsnes gets round to drawing some fascinating comparisons and unearthing some astute comments from Irgens-Jensen in which he adumbrates what Nielsen was offering the world musically (itself a pellucid insight into the Norwegian's own music). Like one of the composer's own patient, old-school structures, Vollsnes offers chapter and verse on his creative activities with minimal



Ludvig Irgens-Jensen (left), Christian Sinding and Odd Grüner-Hegge (right) in the early 1930s, on the veranda of Grüner-Hegge's summer house on the Oslo Fjord

reflective opinion before delivering a final chapter dealing with musical style in which he sets out (and builds on) a clear consensus: here was a man with a serious talent, with firm musical principles but with a soul that perhaps only his craft (and I would add to that his 'Norwegian-ness') could reveal. To borrow Geirr Tveitt's summary quoted by Vollsnes, Irgens-Jensen was 'modest but with greatness in his inner being' and 'Nordic without making a song and dance'. The latter comment can be read in a musicological sense as well as in a personal one.

Irgens-Jensen was evidently a private man, for all his indiscriminate friendliness. A lack of extant source material means Vollsnes can sometimes have a hard time bringing his subject to life; details of his family relationships (not least his rapid marriage – how did it progress?) are minimal but we get a good insight into key friendships with Odd Grüner-Hegge, Knudåge Riisager and others. One of the characteristics that does leap out – and it is something neither his colleagues nor Vollsnes can quite bring themselves to say, surely given their propinquity to his creative and geographical world – is Irgens-Jensen's absolute Norwegian nationality. It's there in his quietness, in his abhorrence of self-importance, in his occasional naive innocence (he made the odd 'odd' decision during the Second World War but was irrefutably at loggerheads with Norway's Nazi sympathisers), in his spirited mountaineering (few fears, no ropes) and in his fondness for tobacco (he once ate a cigarette). It's there in the music of course, too, and Vollsnes's text is good on helping us understand how and why.

In the same vein, he paints a vivid if sometimes overly modest picture of life in Oslo in the early years of the 20th century, not least the formation of its performing ensembles – useful context for many other creative exploits that were occurring around the time. (Later on, it's fascinating to read of the opening of Oslo's City Hall in 1950 and see a sketch of the opening ceremony at which Irgens-Jensen's *Canto d'omaggio* was first performed – he also chose, with Grüner-Hegge, the bells for one of the towers.) It's easy to see that particular Norwegian naivety in a newly unflattering light when you read of Irgens-Jensen's position on the board of a composition competition he himself won (albeit in a different category, although the other judges would surely have recognised both his handwriting and his musical style), which perhaps explains why Vollsnes is keen to point up Norway's 'small country syndrome' – still a national pastime for Norwegian commentators and historians.

And you can hardly blame Irgens-Jensen's Norwegian colleagues for wanting to push him forwards at every opportunity. The Passacaglia seems to have proved a huge wake-up call to the Norwegian musical establishment, a realisation that they had a composer on their hands who was Norwegian in a new, post-Griegian way – in the same way as, for want of a better comparison, Nielsen was Danish – yet who could prove a force to be reckoned with abroad (the Passagalica was performed the world over in the years after its Oslo premiere in 1927 and taken up by Toscanini).

There are detailed examinations of the rest of Irgens-Jensen's output from Vollsnes, a great deal of sources are quoted (sometimes a little too extensively) and there are copious musical examples and revealing photographs, including one of the composer, in later years, perched on a ledge halfway up a mountain in West Jotunheim. This is a solid and thorough first biography and Vollsnes is a passionate advocate of his subject. Beryl Foster's translation of the original (but slightly updated) 2000 text is clear and nuanced. Now the cross-examination of Irgens-Jensen can begin, but ultimately he will be judged, by listeners, on his music. And if you haven't heard it before, stop reading this and seek some out – perhaps the Passacaglia. It's an astounding piece that will tempt you to read this book more persuasively than any review could.

**Andrew Mellor**

# *Classics* RECONSIDERED






**Mike Ashman** and **David Patrick Stearns** discuss the merits of Beecham's 1956 recording of La bohème – an impromptu affair that made opera history



## Puccini

La bohème

*Sols incl* **Jussi Björling** *ten* **Victoria de los Angeles** *sop*
**RCA Victor Chorus and Orch / Sir Thomas Beecham**
Naxos Ⓢ ② 8 111249-50

Beecham's tempi are on the whole slower than those adopted by Toscanini. In the light of what the composer told Sir Thomas in 1920 however we must accept that *his* tempi and emphasis, and not Toscanini's, are what Puccini meant. At the moments of lyrical expansion, in the accompanying of the duet between Mimì and Marcello in Act 3 and in the quartet in the same act, I find Beecham's fuller. There is more savouring, more grandly eloquent handling of the adorable music, and it is truer to what I feel about it. (These things end in purely personal tastes, between great artists.) Anyway, if there is anywhere a more sheerly gorgeous piece of 'soaring' than this Mimì in the episode 'Sono andati?' (Act 4, left alone with Rudi) one would like to know of it. At the words 'come il mare grand ed infinita', soprano and orchestra simply soar heavenward in the palm of Beecham's hand – I can think of no other way of describing it, but then Beecham's power of revivifying music remains indescribable. Time and again this score too is 're-heard' as one may re-see a picture 'with a rinsed eye' as the French say. In short, without denigrating Toscanini's ardent and springy performance, I do prefer this new set.

Victoria de los Angeles sounds wonderful *à toute epreuve* and Björling is likewise wonderful in being so reliable and stylish over every hurdle. The solos and duet of Act 1; the trio from 'Mimì é una civetta' in Act 3; and the whole of the last act from the entry of Mimì represent a totality of singing by principals and orchestra which is quite glorious. One goes head over heels in love with the opera all over again.

**Philip Hope-Wallace** (1/57)

**Mike Ashman** I am still massively attached to this performance: my first *La bohème*, my first complete opera recording, the first time I heard Jussi Björling. I was already something of a Beecham fan but never before had I heard him conduct opera. After living with the set for many years, it is the fluent organisation by the conductor of the trickiest ensemble passages which still stands out for the listener. The Act 2 street/cafe scene flies by in less than 20 minutes, but for the performers it's a logistic nightmare comprising every grand opera musical effect, including both onstage and offstage extra choruses and children's voices, not to mention the dangerously independent brass band. There are an infinite number of nasty little tempo changes, but Beecham wraps them all together in one fluent and amazingly 'live'-sounding paragraph. Also in this act, the characterisation of, say, the little boy who wants the toy trumpet and the horse, Parpignol and Alcindoro, and Colline's naughty Latin jokes about Mimì and sex are clear and funny without being self-consciously blown up.

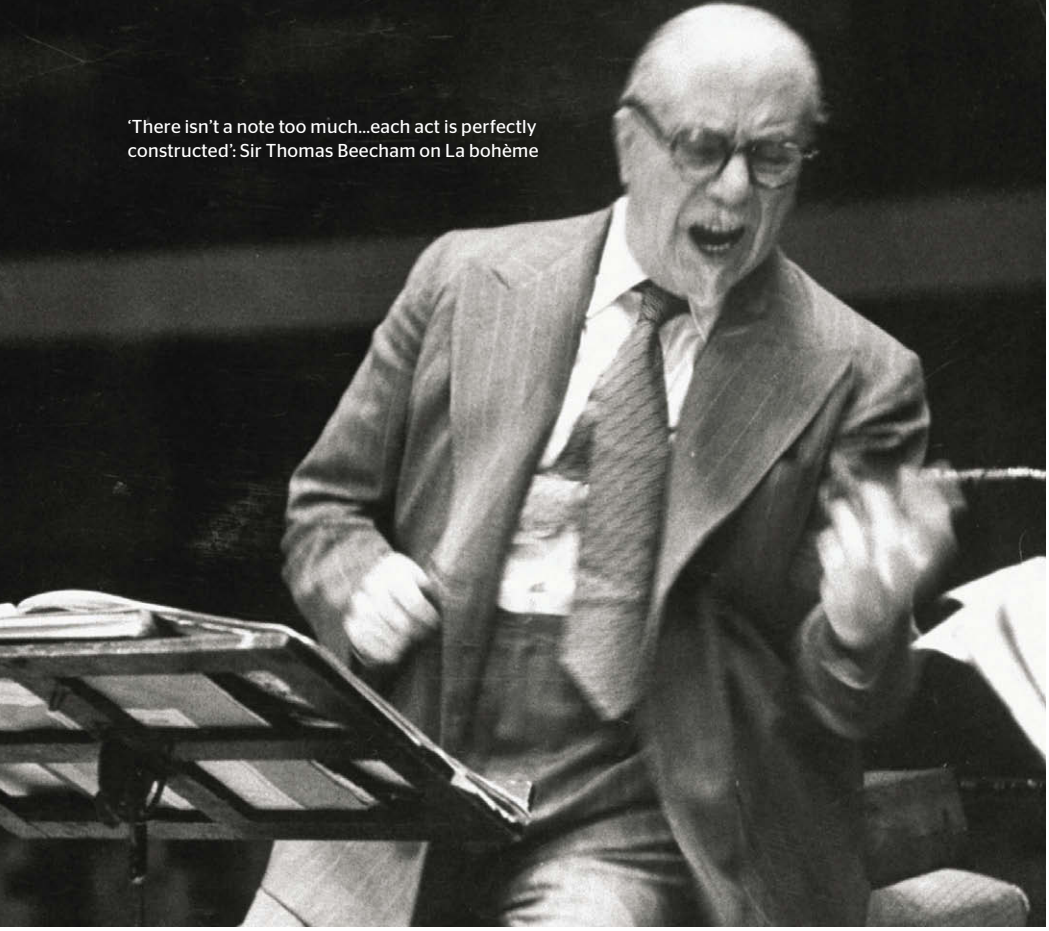
**David Patrick Stearns** You're speaking my language – absolutely. Whenever I pop in and out of super-busy Penn Station in New York City I pass by the Manhattan Center, where it was recorded, and imagine the wonderful *La bohème* cast coming and going – Victoria de los Angeles finishing up before setting off for what was then called Idlewild Airport, with some grizzled cabbie waiting outside – with none of them aware that opera history was being made.

And it was history that almost wasn't made. The recording was organised when the recording executives realised that Björling, de los Angeles and Beecham would be in New York at the same time. Much of the orchestra came from the Metropolitan Opera, the chorus from the New York City Opera. The recording circumstances were a generous eight days spread over three weeks. In contrast, the New York City Opera's own recordings were made live in the studio because retakes weren't affordable. Beverly Sills was once told, 'No matter what happens, honey, just keep singing.'

Returning to this *La bohème* in Mark Obert-Thorn's remastering on Naxos, I'm knocked out by how natural it all feels. Victoria and Jussi (sorry, but I do feel they're my friends) truly treat the recitatives like elevated speech. I never catch them 'performing'. They're just living their roles, exchanging intimacies, though with their own stylish brand of living.

I love your remarks about Beecham. What they add up to, for me, is a sense of fun that I don't hear in other recordings. Although this was Beecham's only complete Puccini opera recording, he knew Puccini and is said to have talked at length with him about *La bohème*. Yet he wasn't born into this world in the manner of, say, Tullio Serafin. What differences do you hear between him and the old Italian maestros?

**MA** He was more Germanic than them – not meaning that he was heavier and less Latin, but that he conducted the piece more symphonically and less as a number opera than conductors in the Italian tradition such as Serafin, Toscanini or Antonio Pappano. That wintry pedal point – that opens and closes Act 3 (freezing Christmas at the 'gate of Hell' toll barrier) – in no other version



'There isn't a note too much...each act is perfectly constructed': Sir Thomas Beecham on La bohème

does it seem like it's there the whole time, running underneath as an important counterpoint to the action. Also, with Serafin, the lush recording and senior cast (Tebaldi, Bergonzi) make the piece sound more like late Verdi. I want to compare Beecham's handling of the Puccini to one of his lesser-known French opera recordings – his Buenos Aires *Samson et Dalila*, in which the whole of Act 2 (Samson's overthrow) follows on unstoppably from Dalila's 'Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix' aria. Similarly, in this *La bohème* there's a continuous dramatic *crescendo* in what one might call bohemian fortunes from Rodolfo's 'Che gelida manina' right up to the passing military band in Act 2 which enables them to escape from Cafe Momus without paying the bill. That's Beecham the natural opera director – even in a studio with a cast assembled pretty much ad hoc. He obviously loves these people, as you suggest, more than Toscanini – and we come to love them, too. It's been written that Björling was an indifferent actor and, in a stage production, could look like an uncle to these students. But here, throughout, he sounds like their poetic leader.

**DPS** One must ask which Italian tradition? And what that means. In the Serafin, the middle section of Mimì's Act 1 aria has such a swell of sound that I can't believe it wasn't aided by some control-room wizardry. Is that Italian tradition? Going back to the 1938 La Scala *La bohème* with Albanese and Gigli, conducted by Berrettoni, the voices lead the way, and they do so with stylised *parlando*, long-held climactic notes, all manner of sobs and chortles that sound artificial and get in the way of the opera. Italian tradition? Toscanini wiped out all of that, though in his *La bohème* it sounds like he peeled away the varnish as well. That recording was my first exposure to the opera and it put me off the piece itself because everybody sounded so frantic.

Then I skipped ahead to Herbert von Karajan's studio recording and a progression fell into place: as recordings came to be more conductor driven, the orchestra advanced more to the foreground. With Karajan's sense of colour, the orchestra is almost like scenery – the attention-stealing Franco Zeffirellian sort. With Beecham, orchestra and singers are all of a piece, mainly because the orchestra reveals what's in the characters' minds and hearts. Although Beecham's recording might've sounded French in the colouring he delivered for Mimì's Act 1 entrance, the timbre has a keen psychological impact. You're hearing the profound purity of Mimì's soul. At the end of the day, Beecham defies nationalities. Beecham was Beecham.

What are your feelings about the other singers?

**MA** As you said about Björling and de los Angeles not 'performing', there are no stars being stars in this performance. Whoever had the final casting say must have been aware that Beecham wouldn't have tolerated that in what he called (in a 1956 interview heard on the Naxos reissue) 'one of the three or four most perfect operas in the world – there isn't a note too much, a bar too much. Each act is perfectly constructed.' So Lucine Amara's Musetta is not a stand-up pantomime dame who suddenly gets a heart in Act 4; she's Marcello's wilful girlfriend, and 'Quando m'en vo' is laid on just for him. What's more, a host of small moments with the supporting cast have been worked on in detail to increase their humour and pathos: the precise rhythm of Alcindoro's interjection 'Quel canto scurrile mi muove la bile' in Musetta's song; the genuinely funny 'English' accent that John Reardon – already an experienced TV performer – uses for Schaunard's description of the parrot-owning milord; the range of tempos for Giorgio Tozzi's farewell to his beloved coat. I do find de los Angeles a touch abstract and operatic in her final scene with Rodolfo, and Merrill's Marcello can be rather old(er)-fashioned-sounding (ie Verdian) in the way that he grabs at accents. But they're not serious blots. This recording would have been a classic anyway but it was clearly an impromptu event that came off well in front of the microphones.

**DPS** Or seemingly impromptu. You know, there were composite takes in there, but you'd never know it with Beecham's perfect sense of continuity. I am of two minds with the 'coat aria' (and maybe we finally disagree): it's beautifully done but perhaps too restrained to make its full effect. Then sometimes the restraint feels like dignity.

Generally, Act 4 is the recording's greatest triumph. From the first notes, Björling's less-than-bright tone tells me that he's no longer carefree. Too much has gone down. Even when expressing great emotion, Amara's Musetta does so with self-possessed sheen in her tone – more than in Act 2. She's the survivor. In contrast to de los Angeles's yielding vocal quality, Amara tells you Mimì's fate will never be hers. In Maria Callas's version of Mimì's death scene, the colour drains from her voice as her life ebbs away – it's a technical feat. De los Angeles's scene is a rhetorical feat. She makes her voice falter with equal effectiveness, still articulating the words in ways that say Mimì still wants to live. Also, the voice maintains a solid core that was the source of de los Angeles's charisma. Her voice never reached out to you, but made you want to come closer. Has there been anybody like her since? G

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL ROUGIER/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

# *Orchestral Christmas carols*

Music for Christmas takes many forms, as we all know. This year **Jeremy Nicholas** recommends recordings of pieces in the medley-esque orchestral and/or choral genre based on selections of popular carols

There are Christmas cantatas, there are Christmas oratorios (Bach and Saint-Saëns, among others). There are tone poems of Christmas (Bax's *Christmas Eve on the Mountains*), and suites (Rimsky-Korsakov's *Christmas Eve*). There is even a *Christmas* Symphony (though how Krzysztof Penderecki's unwaveringly sinister Symphony No 2 acquired that nickname merely by seeming to quote a phrase of *Silent Night* is a mystery). And we must not forget the countless Christmas pop songs that blight the lives of shop assistants from November onwards, for instance 'White Christmas', 'Frosty the Snowman', 'Little Donkey' and 'Mistletoe and Wine' (named last year as the most hated Christmas song of all time).

All these, from Corelli's 1714 *Christmas* Concerto (Op 6 No 8) onwards, consist of original music by their various composers. Then there are works that use Christmas carols and hymns for their material. Composers of instrumental (usually organ) pieces tend to take one tune and write a set of variations on it (see last Christmas's 'Specialist's Guide'). But there is another Christmas music genre: choral and/or orchestral works that weave a selection of seasonal melodies into a fantasy, overture or some equivalent. The earliest of these seems to be William Henry Fry's 1853 *Santa Claus* (see the top choice here), but with the growing popularity of Christmas concerts (always a nice little earner for orchestras), the 20th century saw the advent of medleys and pot-pourris in various shapes and forms. Perhaps not surprisingly, whatever the individual harmonic language of the composer, all the tunes employed in these are the traditional tonal and melodic congregational songs that have established themselves as part of Christmastide carol services. 'Adeste fideles', 'The First Nowell' and 'God rest ye, merry gentlemen' make frequent appearances in this guide (which admittedly includes a work by Langford which isn't strictly orchestral). There's a good reason for that. G



PHOTOGRAPHY: STU ROSNER

Continuing a seasonal tradition: The Boston Pops Orchestra, for which Leroy Anderson wrote A Christmas Festival in 1950



## 10 *Anderson*

**A Christmas Festival**
Boston Pops / Arthur Fiedler
RCA Gold Seal Ⓑ 6428

This overture of popular Christmas carols by America's pre-eminent light music composer was commissioned by Arthur Fiedler for the Boston Pops Orchestra in 1950. Leroy Anderson wrote two different versions, the original and an abbreviated one made in 1952, both beginning with 'Joy to the World' and ending with 'Jingle Bells' and 'O come, all ye faithful'. The 1959 recording, which also includes Anderson's evergreen *Sleigh Ride*, still sounds amazingly fresh.



## 9 *Hely-Hutchinson*

**Carol Symphony**
Pro Arte Orchestra / Barry Rose
EMI Ⓕ CDM764131-2 (12/91)

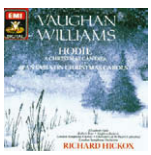
This is a traditional four-movement symphony and the first substantial orchestral work to use mainly traditional carols (as opposed to 19th-century Christmas hymns) for its thematic material. South African-born Victor Hely-Hutchinson, who would become the BBC's Director of Music in 1944, wrote it in 1927: 'Adeste fideles' (first movement), 'God rest ye, merry gentlemen' (*Scherzo*), 'The Coventry Carol' and 'The First Nowell' (slow movement), 'Here we come a-wassailing' and, again, 'Adeste fideles' (finale).



## 8 *Kelly*

**Improvisations on Christmas Carols**
City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra / Gavin Sutherland
Naxos Ⓑ 8 557099

Bryan Kelly (*b* 1934), a student of Herbert Howells, Gordon Jacob and Nadia Boulanger, is best known for his choral music. In this set of pieces (composed 1969) he dispenses with words and has resourceful and mischievous contrapuntal fun with six favourite carols. The five short movements (none longer than three minutes) make up what is really an orchestral suite – and the first item on a terrific disc of carol-based orchestral works.



## 7 *Vaughan Williams*

**Fantasia on Christmas Carols**
Soloists, Choristers of St Paul's Cathedral, LSO / Richard Hickox
EMI Ⓕ CDC754128-2

This single-movement work, from around the same time as the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and *Five Mystical Songs*, lasts a modest 12'. No mere succession of melodies (they include 'The truth sent from above', 'Come all you worthy gentlemen', 'On Christmas night all Christians sing', 'There is a fountain'), this, with its magical orchestration and vocal colouring, has been a perennial favourite with choral societies since its premiere at the Three Choirs Festival (Hereford) 1912.



## 6 *Langford*

**A Christmas Fantasy**
Huddersfield Choral Society, John Foster Black Dyke Mills Band / Roy Newsome
Chandos Ⓢ CHAN4541

An unashamedly populist medley of Christmas favourites seamlessly linked by Gordon Langford's expert arrangement, and in a sumptuous recording in which singers, brass and organ combine to lift the roof off Huddersfield Town Hall. The party ends with the brass playing 'Deck the halls' and 'Ding dong! Merrily on high' against the choir's 'The First Nowell', the final item on a disc that's guaranteed to raise the meanest Scrooge's spirits.



## 5 *Standford*

**A Christmas Carol Symphony**
City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra / Gavin Sutherland
Naxos Ⓑ 8 557099

Patric Standford died in April aged 75. His *A Christmas Carol Symphony* was first performed by the BBC Concert Orchestra on Christmas Eve 1979. Its four movements use no less than 12 carols ranging from 'Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen' to 'We wish you a merry Christmas'. Philip Lane's booklet-notes reveal that the work 'grew out of a pot-pourri of seasonal tunes played to entertain [Standford's] children in the framework of an eighteenth century symphony'.



## 4 *Britten*

**Men of Goodwill**
Minnesota Orchestra / Sir Neville Marriner
EMI Ⓢ (37) 217526-2 (3/84[R], 7/88[R])

Though hardly one of Britten's finest works, this short (8'34"), inventive set of variations on 'God rest ye, merry gentlemen' doesn't deserve its present obscurity. It was the last incidental music he wrote for the BBC, originally heard on the wireless immediately preceding King George VI's 1947 Christmas Day message, and not published until 1982. The fugal finale (omitted from the broadcast) is a subdued cousin of that in *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.



## 3 *Coleridge-Taylor, arr Baynes*

**Christmas Overture**
BBC Concert Orchestra / Barry Wordsworth
Naxos Ⓑ 8 570331

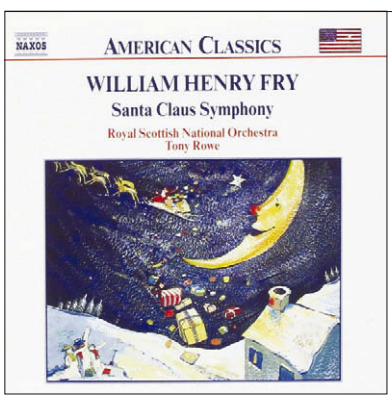
This charming – if slight – overture has its origins in the music (commissioned by Herbert Beerbohm Tree) for a 'poetical fairy drama' by Alfred Noyes which was never produced. Although Coleridge-Taylor recycled some of the music in other works, he never used this section, which was arranged by Sydney Baynes (famous for his *Destiny* waltz). 'Good King Wenceslas' and 'Hark! the herald angels sing' are the overture's main ports of call.



## 2 *Arnold, orch Palmer*

**Fantasy on Christmas Carols**
BBC Philharmonic / Rumon Gamba
Chandos Ⓕ CHAN9851

Christopher Palmer's 1991 score for this flamboyant showpiece tells us that the music is derived from three Malcolm Arnold works: the 1952 film *The Holly and the Ivy* (featuring the eponymous carol and 'The First Nowell'); a TV documentary called *Christmas Round-Up* ('I saw three ships'); and carol arrangements 'contributed to the Save the Children Fund 1960' ('The First Nowell' again, and 'Away in a manger'). This is a superb Chandos recording.




## 1 *Fry* Santa Claus: Christmas Symphony

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Tony Rowe Naxos Ⓑ 8 559057 (12/00)

William Henry Fry (1813-64) was the first native-born American composer to write for large symphonic forces. He claimed his symphony of 1853 was 'the longest instrumental composition ever written on a single subject, with unbroken continuity', and it is said to be the first work ever to use the saxophone. It lasts just over 26 minutes and follows the story of Christ's birth, a family's Christmas Eve gathering, a snowstorm and Santa Claus's arrival, ending with a hymn of praise in the form of 'Adeste fideles' – an orchestral celebration like no other of the sentimental, Dickens-inspired Christmases of the 19th century.

**Follow Gramophone at Qobuz to listen to a selection of complete recordings from Jeremy Nicholas's Specialist's Guide survey**

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION



# *Berlioz's new-found purity and simplicity*

In **L'enfance du Christ**, many early listeners thought they detected a radical change in Berlioz's musical style and manner; the composer begged to differ. **Geoffrey Norris** chooses his favourite recording

'What is the aim of religious music?' Berlioz asked himself and his readers when he published an article in the Catholic weekly *Correspondant* in April 1829. His answer was: 'To move and uplift the soul by the expression of the sentiments embodied in the words of which it is a setting. In what does it differ from dramatic music?' he further wondered. 'In that religious ideas exclude anything frivolous that might be incompatible with them. But that is the only way in which they differ. In fact, the expression of feeling is as much the object of the one as it is of the other.'

Berlioz's sacred trilogy *L'enfance du Christ*, completed in December 1854, stands as a signal musical manifestation of the views he expressed a quarter of a century earlier. Neither opera nor oratorio, *L'enfance du Christ* nonetheless contains elements of both. We can, for example, experience a powerful operatic stimulus when listening to the final part of Herod's Dream, with its mounting tensions and the cabalistic rituals of the soothsayers. Similarly, Mary and Joseph's urgent seeking for shelter amid their hostile surroundings in Part 3 implies stage movement to match the panic of their emotions. Yet *L'enfance du Christ* is also a work of meditative concentration, with passages that might even be equated with the profound poignancy of a Bach Passion.

Berlioz's score is *sui generis*. It is what it is, and one of the factors I had in mind when comparing all these versions was how finely the balance between drama and devoutness was struck, how smoothly integrated or differentiated the two facets were and how they contributed to the broad structural and emotional arc that the music, in the best performances, describes.

Berlioz expressed himself in *L'enfance du Christ* with a particular purity and simplicity. Bearing in mind the deliberate musical archaisms that he employed, he once said that 'many people imagined that they could detect a radical change in my style and manner' (as indeed might we, if we compare *L'enfance du Christ* with the *Symphonie fantastique* of 20 years earlier). 'But,' Berlioz countered, 'this opinion is entirely without foundation. The subject naturally lent itself to a gentle and simple style of music.' This is a crucial aspect of the score, evident to a greater or lesser degree throughout all three parts. Moreover, there is a continuous narrative thread running through *L'enfance du Christ*, for all that it is a sequence of tableaux and was conceived in piecemeal fashion over a number of years. The seed of it was the well-known 'Shepherds' Farewell', composed in 1850 and frequently extracted these days as a separate concert item or church anthem. The rest of The Flight into Egypt (eventually to become Part 2 of *L'enfance du Christ*) followed a couple of years later, and The Arrival at Sais (Part 3) was written early in 1854, with the opening section, Herod's Dream, being completed that same summer. The first performance of the entire sacred trilogy was in Paris at the Salle Herz on December 10, 1854.

## THE RECORDINGS

So far as the discs under discussion are concerned, the dates of recording stretch from 1959 with the Choeurs de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française and Orchestre des Concerts Colonne under Pierre Dervaux on the Adès label, up to 2012 and the Swedish Radio Symphony



Flight into Egypt: predella panel from Gentile da Fabriano's altarpiece 'Adoration of the Magi'

PHOTOGRAPHY: WORLD HISTORY ARCHIVE/ALAMY

Choir and Orchestra under Robin Ticciati on Linn. The late Sir Colin Davis, who enjoyed a special closeness to Berlioz's music, features as conductor on three recordings: the first, with the St Anthony Singers and the Goldsborough Orchestra, was released in 1961 on L'Oiseau-Lyre; the second, with the John Alldis Choir and the London Symphony Orchestra, was recorded in 1976 for Philips; and the last, again with the LSO but with Tenebrae as the chorus, came out in 2007 on the orchestra's own label.

The strangest disc – and one that has to fall at the first hurdle – is from the **Ensemble Carpe Diem** at a public concert given in the Eglise Saint-Pierre de Montmartre in 2003. Admittedly, the version they perform is described as being 'd'après la Trilogie Sacrée d'Hector Berlioz', but it is quite a long way after. This is an adaptation by Jean-Pierre Arnaud, much condensed to a little over an hour instead of the 90-plus minutes that the piece usually takes, and with a Narrator who recites rather than sings his commentary, underpinned by the orchestra much in the manner of classic melodrama. The sung lines are undertaken by one soprano and one baritone; there is no chorus and the instrumental forces are reduced to a mere eight players, quite cleverly, it must be said, but not really equating to the aural perspective that Berlioz had in mind.

While we might look to the conductors to establish the overall shape, pace and dramatic vision of *L'enfance du Christ*, the characterisation of the individual roles is key to making the music yield up its emotional substance. The tenor Narrator, who occupies a similar (if much less prominent) position to that of the Evangelist in Bach's Passions, is an observer of rather than a participant in the events but he is crucial to establishing the piece's mood. His are the first words to be heard: 'Dans la crèche, en ce temps, Jésus venait de naître' ('At that time Jesus had just been born in the manger'). He must sing them, according to Berlioz, 'avec solennité' ('with solemnity'). He is relating, softly, the story of the holy birth, and preparing us for the fear and wrathful darkness of Herod's soul. Oddly enough, it was when looking to see who all the Narrators were on these various recordings that I realised how few of the releases actually feature French artists. In fact, apart from Carpe Diem's truncated

version, there is only one – the 1959 recording conducted by **Pierre Dervaux** – that fields a wholly French complement, featuring as it does Christiane Gayraud as Mary, Michel Roux as Joseph and André Vessières as Herod. The Narrator is Michel Sénéchal, a light, clear tenor and one who expresses the text with palpable feeling. But then, as the purely orchestral Night March gets under way with (as the 'stage' directions tell us) the Roman soldiers on patrol in Jerusalem, the age of the recording begins to tell against it: despite digital remastering there is a thinness to the sound and a less than ideal balance of instrumental timbres. This somewhat limits its appeal as a version that can encompass the full gamut of nuance that Berlioz requires.

Nearly all the other Narrators are Anglophone. Anthony Rolfe-Johnson features on two recordings, first with the English Chamber Orchestra under **Philip Ledger** on ASV (1985), then with **John Eliot Gardiner**, the Monteverdi Choir and the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Lyon on Erato two years later. Of all the English Narrators, Rolfe-Johnson is the one of choice: his tone is mellifluous, his phrasing (both in the introduction and in his touching conclusion to the trilogy) is beautifully judged, and his understanding of the implications of the text yields up an affecting sense of mystery and awe. On the Gardiner version the voice is given a little more acoustic space, but that in itself is no adverse reflection on the high quality of Ledger's interpretation.



Janet Baker, who featured on Berlioz specialist Colin Davis's second recording of L'enfance du Christ alongside Thomas Allen

The 1965 version with **André Cluytens** conducting the Choeurs René Duclos and Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire on EMI has long been regarded as a classic interpretation of *L'enfance du Christ* and Cluytens's natural instincts for the music are manifest throughout a performance that has justifiably stood up to competition for almost half a century. My reservation here, in comparing it with its rivals, is that by heading the cast with two such star opera singers as Nicolai Gedda (Narrator) and Victoria de los Angeles (Mary), the work tends to lose something of its intimacy. Gedda sings wonderfully, although, reasonably enough, he veers more towards an operatic stance in the Narrator's role than that of an observant commentator. The uneven tone of Victoria de los Angeles – by this time past the peak of her career – does not add to the disc's positive attributes when set against other recordings featuring the likes of Dame Janet Baker, Véronique Gens and Anne Sofie von Otter.

Apart from Dervaux's 1959 version, two others use a French Narrator and they choose the same one, Yann Beuron: he sings both for **Sir Colin Davis** on his third





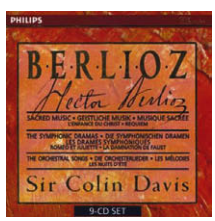

## THE PERIOD CHOICE

**Collegium Vocale Gent; Chapelle Royale; Champs-Elysées Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe**

Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ ② HMG50 1632/3

With a first-rate cast and choir, Herreweghe brings his thoughts on historically aware performance to bear on Berlioz's score, finding both a lightness of touch and a depth of feeling together with a convincing architectural span and orchestral sonorities that glow.






## CHOICE FOR THE BEST MARY

**John Alldis Choir; London Symphony Orchestra / Colin Davis**

Philips Ⓢ ⑨ 462 252-2PB9

Janet Baker, whether in *Les nuits d'été*, *La mort de Cléopâtre* or here in *L'enfance du Christ*, is an artist inextricably linked with Berlioz, and her interpretation of Mary expresses tenderness and trepidation in a way that probes deeply into the character on a recording directed by another Berlioz natural, Colin Davis.






## CHOICE FOR ENGLISH NARRATOR

**English Chamber Chorus and Orchestra / Philip Ledger**

ASV Ⓕ ② CDDCD452

You realise how much you miss the refined artistry of Anthony Rolfe-Johnson when you hear his beautifully inflected singing as Narrator on this disc, which is recommended for all sorts of other reasons as well, particularly for the Mary and Joseph of Fiona Kimm and William Shimell, and the performance's judicious perspective.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC AND ARTS PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY. MICHEL GARNIER. GAUTIER DEBLONDE

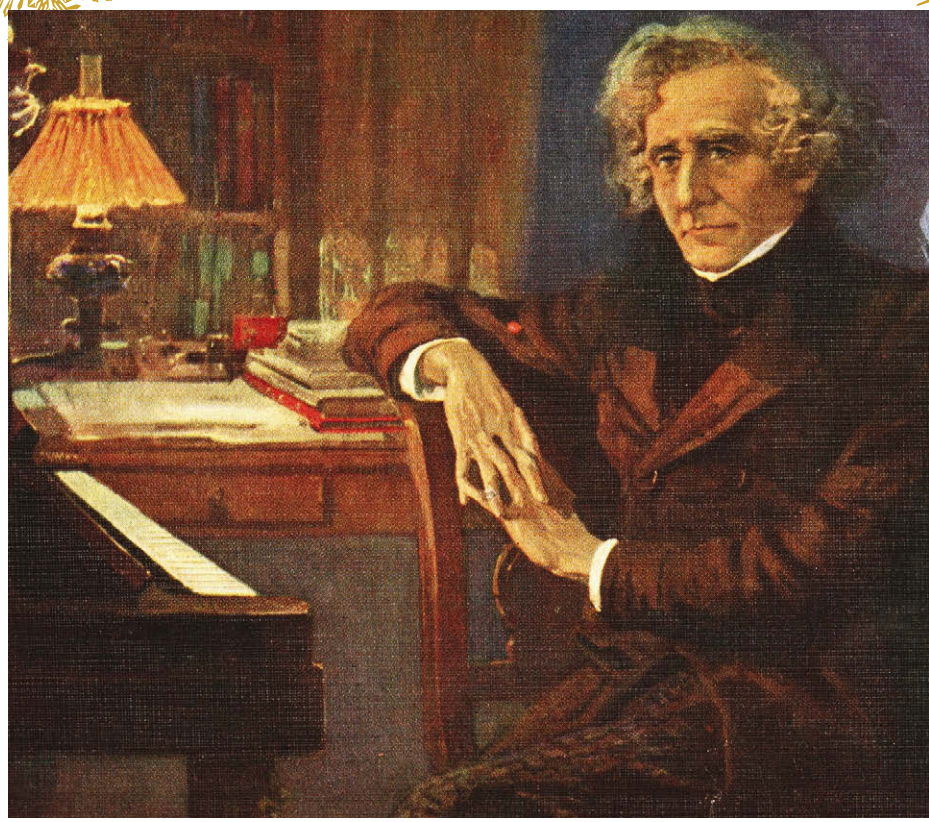
recording and for **Robin Ticciati** with his Swedish forces, and in both he conveys an ethereal weightlessness but also a true sense of the weighty import of the news he is imparting. This became one of the deciding factors in listening to and comparing these 14 versions.

## THE KING'S DREAM

The Herod's Dream sequence, which incorporates the king's anxious recitative, his brooding aria (scene 2) and his meeting with the soothsayers (scene 4), is one of those multifaceted sections of *L'enfance du Christ* that most closely approaches the operatic stage, complete with a climactic finale in which Herod sets his mind on the slaughter of the innocents. This extended scena includes one of Berlioz's colouristic exotic touches in which the soothsayers (to quote the directions) 'perform their cabalistic rites and then start their incantation'. Berlioz casts this episode in 7/4 time – or, rather, in alternating bars of 3/4 and 4/4, explaining in a note that the overall effect should be that of a single 7/4 bar. **Sir Roger Norrington**, while fortunate to have such a powerful bass-baritone as Ralf Lukas as his Herod on a 2002 recording with the Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart on Hänssler, seems reticent about giving this passage full rein in its strangeness. He is spot-on in tempo with his crotchet=152 but the playing lacks that last ounce of hallucinatory weirdness to bring the image vividly to life. Gardiner, with a superb Herod in José van Dam, shapes the verbal interjections of the soothsayers with more conversational rise and fall than Norrington does, but that frenzied ritual of theirs again falls a bit flat.

**Philippe Herreweghe**, again with a fine, emotionally restless Herod in Laurent Naouri on his 1997 recording with La Chapelle Royale and the Collegium Vocale Gent on Harmonia Mundi, comes much closer to establishing the eeriness of this passage, mainly because the hairpin dynamic markings and *sforzandos* in the whirling string figuration are given more emphasis, and the combination of oboe and cor anglais in the melody line has a particularly ear-catching tang.

Taking scene 4 as a whole, however, the most compelling, organic interpretation comes from **Robin Ticciati**. His aptly dark-toned Herod is – well, how odd, there's no mention of Herod in the cast list. We have Yann Beuron as Narrator, Véronique Gens as Mary, Stephan Loges as Joseph and Alastair Miles as Father of the Family, but nobody is credited on the packaging as Herod. The ear tells you, however, that Miles doubles as Herod and Father of the Family, and he does so with unerring empathy, capturing both the mental fragility and apprehension of Herod and, contrastingly, the warmth of humanity in the Father of the Family in The Arrival at Sais. Ticciati not only manages the utterances of the soothsayers with apt flow and inflection but also, by means of energetic thrust on the dynamic markings, makes their cabalistic rites all the more unnerving. He finds the precise impact for Herod's abrupt interruption (Berlioz marks it *animé*) and, once the finale gets under way with the *allegro agitato* at bar 556, he builds up the pressure with terrific impetus and terrifying menace.



An idealised vision of Berlioz at work by Lionello Balestrieri; in reality Berlioz couldn't play the piano

## THE HOLY FAMILY

Following the Herod scenes, the conductor is instructed to observe seven bars' silence and a pause, allowing the temperature to drop for the appearance of Mary and Joseph. On his first recording (which also features Peter Pears as Narrator), **Colin Davis** has the sublime Elsie Morison and John Cameron as Mary and Joseph, an interpretation that continues to touch the heart and in which the Goldsborough Orchestra is cheerfully alert to the gamboling of the lambs. On his second version Davis has the dream team of Janet Baker and Thomas Allen; on the third it is Karen Cargill and William Dazeley. All bring their special sensitivities to bear on the roles of Mary and Joseph, as do

# SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1959** | Orch des Concs Colonne / **Dervaux** | Adès Ⓕ ② 13 286-2 (nla) |
| **1960** | ECO / **C Davis** | Decca Ⓕ ② 425 445-2DM2 (7/61[R] – nla) |
| **1965/66** | Paris Conservatoire Orch / **Cluytens** | EMI Ⓢ ② 697175-2 (10/67[R]) |
| **1976** | LSO / **C Davis** | Philips Ⓢ ⑨ 462 252-2PB9 (10/77[R], 1/88[R]) |
| **1985** | ECO / **Ledger** | ASV Ⓕ ② CDDCD452 (9/87 – nla) |
| **1987** | Lyons Op Orch / **Gardiner** | Warner Ⓑ ② 2564 69764-6 (1/88[R]) |
| **1994** | Corydon Orch / **Best** | Hyperion Ⓢ ② CDD22067 (12/95[R]) |
| **1995** | Montreal SO / **Dutoit** | Decca Ⓢ ② 478 4582DM2; Ⓢ ⑰ 478 5577DC17 (12/00[R]) |
| **1997** | Champs-Elysées Orch / **Herreweghe** | Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ ② HMG50 1632/3 (12/97[R]) |
| **2002** | Stuttgart RSO / **Norrington** | Hänssler Classic Ⓕ ② CD93 091 (4/04) |
| **2003** | Ens Carpe Diem | Ambroisie Ⓕ AMB9939 (4/04) |
| **2006** | LSO / **C Davis** | LSO Live Ⓑ ② SACD LSO0606 (10/07) |
| **2007** | Salzburg Mozarteum Orch / **Bolton** | Oehms Ⓕ ② OC917 |
| **2012** | Swedish RSO / **Ticciati** | Linn Ⓑ ② SACD CKD440 (12/13) |

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL NICHOLSON/CORBIS

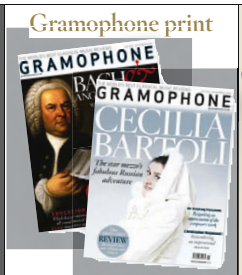
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Véronique Gens and Olivier Lallouette for Herreweghe, Jean Rigby and Gerald Finley for **Matthew Best** on his fine 1994 Hyperion set with the Corydon Singers and Orchestra (and with Alastair Miles as Herod again), Susan Graham and François Le Roux for **Charles Dutoit** on his 1995 Montreal version for Decca, and Anne Sofie von Otter with Gilles Cachemaille for Gardiner. Mireille Delunsch and William Dazeley, with David Wilson-Johnson as Herod, are also affecting (if a touch laboured) on the 2007 Oehms version with the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra under **Ivor Bolton**, but in this second part of *L'enfance du Christ* I have a particular affection for one of the older recordings – the version by Philip Ledger which (in addition to Rolfe-Johnson as Narrator) has Fiona Kimm and William Shimell in glorious, tender voice as Mary and Joseph, and a potent Herod in Richard Van Allan. Deleted but still available if you seek it out, this ASV version has much to commend it in terms of characterisation and dramatic perspective.



Robin Ticciati records L'enfance du Christ with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra

## THE SHEPHERDS' FAREWELL

'L'adieu des bergers' – 'The Shepherds' Farewell' – while perennially the favourite number from *L'enfance du Christ*, occupies a mere four or five minutes in the grand scheme of things but it offers a convenient peg on which to hang the final analysis of all these recordings. Berlioz marks it *Allegretto* with the speed indication of a lilting dotted crotchet=50, far removed from the pious ponderousness it often acquires when sung as a separate item. Davis, who radiates discernment in terms of the tone and scale of this music in all three of his versions, became slightly quicker in 'The Shepherds' Farewell' over the years, down from 4'59" in his first recording to 4'32" in the last one. All of them, in their context, ring true. On the other hand, Gardiner, in a move that might seem uncharacteristic, goes at a snail's pace, indulging 'The Shepherds' Farewell' for almost six minutes. Norrington trips through it at 3'19", though in fact he comes closest to Berlioz's metronome marking. My four favourite discs, however, strike a middle course.

First, in ascending order of recording date, there is **Colin Davis**'s second recording of 1976 with the LSO and John Alldis Choir, drawing on and distilling all his affinity with Berlioz's music in a performance of presence and poise, and having the advantage of an incomparable Mary in Janet Baker. Philip Ledger's 1985 version on ASV is chosen partly for Rolfe-Johnson's eloquent Narrator but also for the emotional finesse of the singing elsewhere, coupled with the well-observed dramatic architecture and the intimate, ensemble nature of the performance.

Another choice is **Philippe Herreweghe**'s set: this is not what you might call obtrusively 'historically informed' but there is nevertheless a sense in the orchestral playing that some accrued varnish has been stripped from a much-loved painting; and the singing of Véronique Gens as Mary, Olivier Lallouette as Joseph, Laurent Naouri as Herod and Paul Agnew as Narrator is beautifully modulated.

But my top choice is the most recent disc, **Robin Ticciati** conducting the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir, a Linn recording released last year. There is a gleaming transparency to the orchestral textures here, coupled with Ticciati's sure ear for how instrumental timbres can animate the colour spectrum. The drama is there; so too is the contemplation, both facets set in ideal equilibrium with moments of tension and repose artlessly judged. Yann Beuron is, you could say, the must-have Narrator; Véronique Gens and Stephan Loges are sublimely matched as Mary and Joseph; and Alastair Miles warmly embraces the roles of both Herod and Father of the Family.

I interviewed Ticciati last year for a 'Musician and the Score' piece at the time this recording of *L'enfance du Christ* was released (12/13). We were talking about a notably tricky passage in Part 3 where wisps of crucial detail in the score and a good many other components go to make up the broader picture. As Ticciati said at the time: 'Once you've sorted out your dramaturgy, once you've sorted out the structure harmonically and the direction of the text, suddenly you see how it should be.' In this performance he has not only seen how it should be but he has also coaxed his forces into conveying to the listener the music's poignant spiritual message and expressive essence. G






## TOP CHOICE

**Swedish Radio Symphony Choir and Orchestra / Robin Ticciati**

Linn Ⓑ ② CKD440

**Artistic discretion and emotional truth go hand in hand in this beautifully observed performance, with Berlioz's luminous orchestration and dramatic scheme perceptively articulated by Robin Ticciati and with a chorus and soloists who unerringly get to the music's heart.**

PHOTOGRAPHY: ARNE HYCKENBERG, MARCO BORGGREVE

# PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

Seasonal fare from *Gramophone*'s Editor for one of this month's playlists as he steers you towards some of his favourite Christmas music. And if the Christmas festivities stop you getting out to the opera house, Hugo Shirley serves up the equivalent of an exotic array of cocktails based on operas – often very sweet but perfect to add some sparkle to your festive gatherings. And, rather more robustly, the violinist Renaud Capuçon offers a playlist of recordings made by the great Italian conductor Carlo Maria Giulini, a list that contains many of the great symphonies of the central repertoire. As always, you can sample these playlists by visiting **gramophone.co.uk/playlists**



Carlo Maria Giulini: a 'deep inspiration' to violinist Renaud Capuçon

## *Carlo Maria Giulini*

### Violinist Renaud Capuçon recalls performing in an orchestra under the great Italian conductor

In 1992, aged 16, I spent my summer playing with the European Community Youth Orchestra conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini. We played Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Lucerne, Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Munich. And my musical life suddenly changed. Giulini became my hero, my mentor. I began to collect his recordings, and go to all his concerts in Paris.

Playing for him, and with him, was a very deep inspiration. His authority in rehearsal, his devotion to music and his respect for the musicians was an example. Until now, I have kept these concerts with him as a personal treasure. He made me realise that a musician is nothing if he's not a good person; his faith touched me very deeply. He was an example of humility. His life was devoted to his family and to music. He was a wonderful human being: kind, generous, elegant – and one of the most pure musicians who ever existed. His repertoire was not huge, but he needed to be in love with a piece to play and record it.

His recordings, made with his 'dear orchestras' (Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Berlin Philharmonic) are a testimony of this Great Musician.

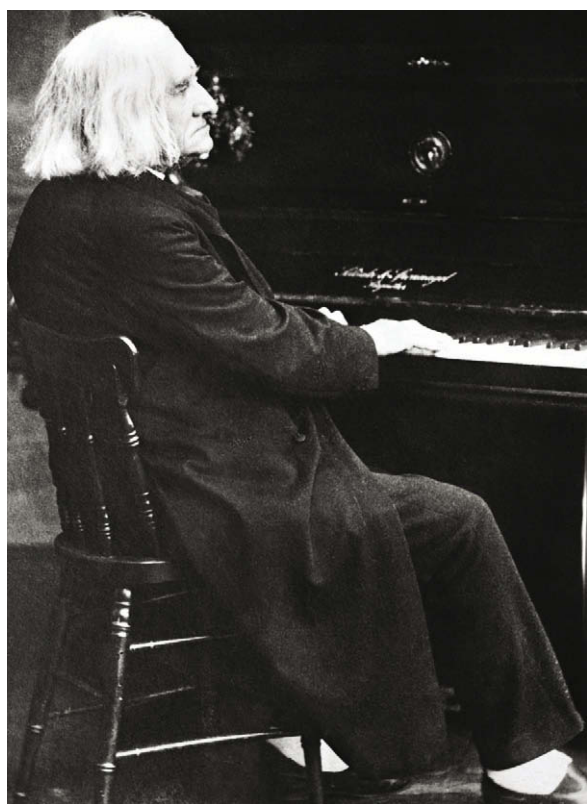
Here are my favourite recordings by Giulini, a musician and a man who changed my life.

- **Brahms** Piano Concerto No 2 Claudio Arrau *pf* Philharmonia **Warner Classics**
- **Mahler** Symphony No 9 Chicago SO **DG**
- **Ravel** Ma mère l'Oye Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra **Sony Classical**
- **Bruckner** Symphony No 8 Vienna PO **DG**
- **Beethoven** Symphony No 9 Berlin PO **DG**
- **Verdi** Requiem Philharmonia **Warner Classics**
- **Schubert** Symphony No 8, 'Unfinished' Los Angeles PO **DG**
- **Verdi** Falstaff Los Angeles PO **DG**
- **Brahms** Violin Concerto Itzhak Perlman *vn* Chicago SO **Warner Classics**

## *Operatic paraphrases*

### Hugo Shirley offers a high-calorie cocktail menu of often technically fiendish operatic fantasies

We've plumped for the term 'operatic paraphrase', but these arrangements and reworkings come with many different names, in many different guises, often teetering on the boundaries of bad taste and physical possibility, running the gamut from straightforward to mind-bendingly complex. Liszt was the first great exponent, but his dazzling, dizzying *Réminiscences de Don Juan* shows how he attempted to go beyond the endless arpeggios and roulades of his rival Thalberg (represented here in his *Fantasy on Rossini's Moïse*) to something more



Franz Liszt: pioneer of the operatic paraphrase

ambitious, striving for a musical coherence that is also found in Busoni's *Chamber Fantasy on Carmen*.

Liszt's *Don Carlos* paraphrase, like Sgambati's exquisite later arrangement of Gluck's *Mélodie* and Belgian virtuoso Louis Brassin's take on *Die Walküre*'s Magic Fire Music, demonstrate what can be achieved in more faithful, if hardly less technically demanding transcriptions. Grainger's dreamy, dewy-eyed *Rosenkavalier* 'Ramble' and Sorabji, in his kaleidoscopic operatic 'pastiches' demonstrate a new harmonic and timbral experimentation, while Yvar Mikhashoff, a champion of the post-war American avant-garde, offers a perhaps unexpectedly faithful but luxurious arrangement of 'Vissi d'arte'. Finally, it might not be opera exactly, but Earl Wild's wistful and witty *Reminiscences of Snow White* – complete with straight-faced 'Heigh-ho' *fugato* – shows there's life in the genre yet.

- **Liszt** Réminiscences de Don Juan Marc-André Hamelin **Music & Arts**
- **Thalberg** Fantaisie sur des motifs de Moïse de Rossini Francesco Nicolosi **Marco Polo**
- **Busoni** Chamber Fantasy on Carmen John Ogdon **Warner Classics**
- **Liszt** Don Carlo – Concert paraphrase Claudio Arrau **Philips**
- **Sgambati** Mélodie from Orfeo ed Euridice Hélène Grimaud **DG**
- **Brassin** Die Walküre – Magic Fire Music Joseph Moog **Edition Ruhr**
- **Grainger** Ramble on the the Love Duet from Der Rosenkavalier Jean-Yves Thibaudet **Decca**
- **Sorabji** Pastiche on Rimsky-Korsakov's Hindu Merchant's Song Michael Habermann **BMS**
- **Mikhashoff** Tosca's Vissi d'arte Jean-Yves Thibaudet **Decca**
- **Wild** Reminiscences of Snow White Earl Wild **Ivory Classics**

## *Christmas music*

### Martin Cullingford recommends a playlist of seasonal listening, some familiar, and some more off piste

*Gabriel's Message* opens my list, as this beautiful Basque carol has opened many an Advent season for me, soaring into the candle-lit darkness. On Qobuz you can find a lovely version from King's, Cambridge. Where to go from there? *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* – 'A Spotless Rose' – brings similar spine-tingling emotions (and memories of candlelit choirs). The King's Singers version is a highlight of their enjoyable and appropriately titled album 'Christmas'. If you need a forceful uplift to get you through the post-lunch siesta: colleague Jeremy Nicholas's guide to seasonal organ showpieces (12/13) once sent me in the direction of William Thomas Best's *Christmas Fantasy on Old English Carols*. A choral fantasia on carols from Vaughan Williams is next: hear our recent 'Collection' winner, from Richard Hickox, and feel your spirits soar. And if that's too modern for you, then the exquisite 'On Yoolis Night' by Anonymous 4 takes us back to the 13th century: as Fabrice Fitch wrote of the album, it 'conjures up a fricassee of reflection and revelry, and serves it with panache'. Another fascinating step into 13th-century Christmas – this time one heard around the Mediterranean – came from Boston Camerata and Joel Cohen in 2005. Finzi's deeply moving *In terra pax*, drawing on Robert Bridges, St Luke's Gospel and Finzi's love of the English countryside, returns us to more recent times. Howells's *A Spotless Rose*, another 20th-century Christmas classic, keeps us there, before Gaudete injects some vibrant tempo back into our list. Finally, Darke's setting of *In the Bleak Midwinter* – as well trodden a snowy path as any, and rightly so. Merry Christmas!

- **Trad Basque** Gabriel's Message Choir of King's College, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury **Warner Classics**
- **Praetorius** Es ist ein Rose entsprungen The King's Singers **Signum**
- **Best** Christmas Fantasy on Old English Carols Thomas Laing-Reilly **Delphian**
- **Vaughan Williams** Fantasia on Christmas Carols London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Richard Hickox **Warner Classics**
- **Various** 'On Yoolis Night' Anonymous 4 **Harmonia Mundi**
- **Various** 'A Mediterranean Christmas' Boston Camerata / Joel Cohen **Warner Classics**
- **Finzi** In terra pax City of London Choir; Bournemouth SO / Hilary Davan Wetton **Naxos**
- **Howells** A Spotless Rose Tenebrae / Nigel Short **Signum**
- **Anon** Gaudete The Sixteen / Harry Christophers **Coro**
- **Darke** In the Bleak Midwinter Choir of New College, Oxford / Edward Higginbottom **The Gift of Music**
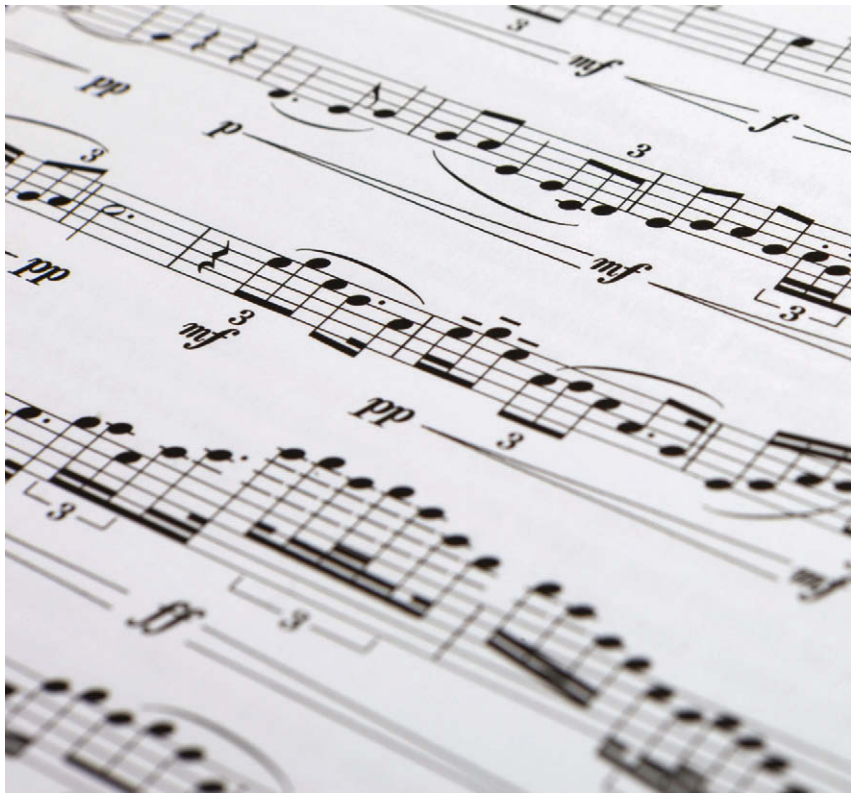
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*Why not contribute a playlist? To do so, visit qobuz.com and explore the available recordings. Once you've created your playlist of 10 recordings, simply send a link with an introductory paragraph and 'playlist' in the subject line to gramophone@markallengroup.com. If we choose your playlist for publication, you'll receive a year's free subscription to Qobuz! See gramophone.co.uk/playlists for more details, and terms and conditions.*



Nigel Short and Tenebrae: their recording of Howells's A Spotless Rose graces the Christmas music playlist

PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES, ARCHIVE PICS/ALAMY





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# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Rattle conducts Sibelius in Berlin, a feast of choral music at London's Temple Church, and broadcasts of annual and much-loved institutions from Vienna and Cambridge

## EVENT OF THE MONTH



Barenboim leading the 2014 New Year's Day Concert

### Vienna Philharmonic and international broadcasters

**The New Year's Day Concert from Vienna, January 1, 11.15am CET**

The traditional New Year's Day Concert finds Zubin Mehta returning for the fifth time, back in the city where he studied, and where he first conducted the Philharmonic in 1961. As well as music by the Strauss family, Mehta will be conducting works by non-Viennese composers Suppé and Lumbye; five works will also be appearing for the first time in the annual concert. No chance of a ticket but it's broadcast throughout the world including on BBC radio and television (first half on BBC Four, second half on BBC Two, and live in full on BBC Radio 3). **bbc.co.uk/radio3**

### Gothenburg Concert Hall and GSO Play

**Jukka-Pekka Saraste conducts Mahler's Sixth, December 11 and 12**

Following his well-received recording of Mahler's Fifth (see review on page 48), Jukka-Pekka Saraste nips over the Finnish border to Sweden to conduct the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in Mahler's fate-laden Sixth. Shortly after the second performance at the Gothenburg Concert Hall, that concert will be available to watch online via the orchestra's subscription streaming service GSO Play.
**gsoplay.se**

### New York's Metropolitan Opera & cinemas

**James Levine conducts Wagner's Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, December 13**

If you're looking for a value-for-money cinema experience why not try the Met's Live in HD cinema broadcast of Wagner's six-hour epic *Die Meistersinger*? Starring Michael Volle as Hans Sachs, Johan Botha as Walther and Annette Dasch as Eva in Otto Schenk's production, James Levine leads proceedings from the pit. Levine's DVD recording of *Meistersinger* for DG was *Gramophone*'s DVD of the Month in June 2005.
**metopera.org**

### Temple Church, London and BBC Radio 3

**The Temple Winter Festival hosts Award-winning choral groups, December 15-19**

For the second year running, BBC Radio 3 takes up residence at the Temple Church in London, a church that can trace its history back to the 12th century and its establishment by the Knights Templar. Five days of concerts, broadcast live, include *Gramophone* Award-winning ensembles Vox Luminis (December 15, Christmas music from the Renaissance and early Baroque) and Polyphony (December 16, 'An English Christmas'). Other groups appearing are Gallicantus (December 17, 16th-century polyphony), Temple Church Choir (December 18 in 20th- and 21st-century music) and the BBC Singers and Norwegian Wind Ensemble (December 19) in Handel's *Messiah* (a concert repeated the following evening at Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden).
**bbc.co.uk/radio3**

### BBC Radio 3

**New Christmas carols unveiled on December 16 – and the winner named on December 23**

One for broadcast or online streaming only, but a chance to engage with a new initiative from Radio 3, a Carol Competition. Composers were asked to set a new poem by Susan Hill, and on December 16 listeners to Radio 3's *Breakfast Show* can hear which ones a panel led by Master of the Queen's Music Judith Weir shortlisted. You can then vote, and on December 23 and Christmas Day itself, hear the winner, as performed by the BBC Singers.
**bbc.co.uk/radio3**

### Berlin Philharmonie & Digital Concert Hall

**Rattle and the Berlin Phil play Sibelius's Fifth with Widmann premiere, December 20**

Yefim Bronfman is the soloist for the world premiere of Jörg Widmann's Piano Concerto. Widmann contributed a work (*Con brio*) to Mariss Jansons recent collection of Beethoven's symphonies (alongside contemporary works) which was *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Month in December 2013. The other works on the programme are Sibelius's Fifth Symphony, Wagner's Prelude to Act 1 of *Tristan und Isolde* and Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, featuring mezzo Stella Doufexis.
**berliner-philharmoniker.de**

### King's College Cambridge and BBC Radio 4

**Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from Cambridge, December 24 at 3pm**

Few services define Christmas quite as evocatively as the annual service from King's, broadcast live by the BBC and around 300 radio stations worldwide. Stephen Cleobury conducts, as he has since 1982. If you'd like to attend the service yourself and sit beneath King's beautiful fan-vaulted roof to hear the choir in the chapel's remarkable acoustic, the college suggests that being in the queue by 9am gives you a decent chance of a place.
**kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel** and **bbc.co.uk/radio4**

PHOTOGRAPHY: TERRY LINKE

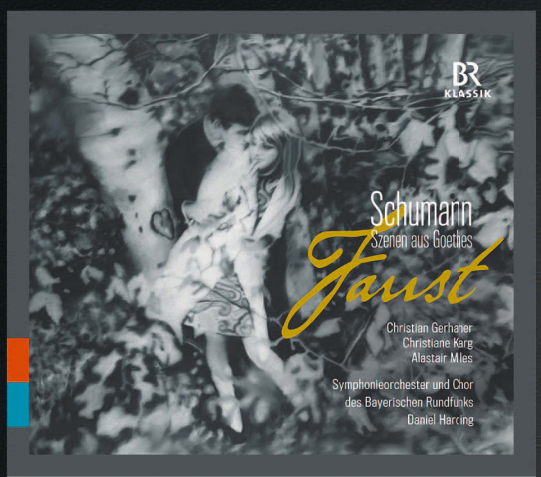
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## *Recording of the month*



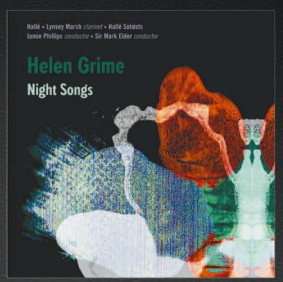

**Daniel Harding**

**Robert Schumann:**
**Szenen aus Goethes Faust**
Symphonieorchester
des Bayerischen Rundfunks
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## *Editor's Choice*




**Peter Hill**
La Fauvette Passirenette
DELPHIAN




**Hallé**
Helen Grime: Night Songs
NMC



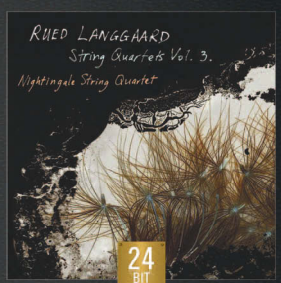

**Markus Stenz**
Karl Amadeus Hartmann :
Simplicius Simplicissimus
CHALLENGE CLASSICS




**Maurice Steger**
Vivaldi: Concerti per flauto
HARMONIA MUNDI




**Paul Spicer**
Howells: When First Thine
Eies Unveil
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**Nightingale String Quartet**
Rued Langgaard:
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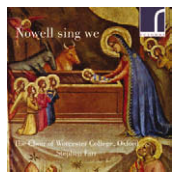


THIS MONTH I've been looking at the latest speakers from a celebrated name, trying a new compact system, and wondering whether it's worth paying for music.
**Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

**MONTH TEST DISCS**




This pairing of Brahms's Third and Fourth conducted by Gergiev is a great example of how a recording can have both focus and a live ambience.




This second set of contemporary carols performed by Worcester Cathedral Choir has glorious space, resonance and air.

## Desktop and portable audio options

Listening to music on the move and at your desk is getting more attractive by the month













The latest company to embrace the concept of desktop audio is Marantz, with the arrival of its HD-DAC1 digital-to-analogue converter/headphone amplifier 1, which combines compatibility with the latest file formats and classic Marantz styling details. Selling for £679, the HD-DAC1 combines its two functions with outputs both for headphones, on a standard 6.3mm front socket, and an amplifier or power amplifier, on fixed- and variable-level RCA sockets. Digital inputs are two optical, one electrical and an asynchronous USB Type B socket on the rear, and a Type A USB on the front panel for the connection of mobile devices and USB memory.

The amplifier section is said to be designed to the same standard as that in the company's SC-11S1 SACD player, has three gain settings to allow it to drive headphones of up to 600ohm impedance, and uses Marantz HDAM-SA2 amplifier modules. The casework uses the familiar double-layer base for vibration isolation, and there's a signature 'porthole' display and gloss wood side panels reminiscent of the company's past amplifiers and receivers.

On the luxury front, just launched in the UK are the £1499 oBravo HAMT-1 headphones 2, using a coaxial driver design combining an Air Motion Transformer tweeter and a neodymium-magnet mid/bass driver. The tweeter uses a folded diaphragm acting like an accordion bellows in a high-intensity magnetic field, giving it a very rapid response aided by its low mass and the very small movements required to generate sound.

For music on the move, users of Android smartphones and tablets have been less well-served than those using Apple's iOS devices. However Alpha Design Labs, part of Tokyo-based Furutech, is attempting to remedy that with its £435 A1 DAC/headphone amplifier 3, designed to work with Android OTG (on the go) devices as well as computers via USB and other devices with an optical digital output.

Designed to fit in the palm of the hand and powered by an internal rechargeable battery said to be good for 7.5 hours of listening, the A1 has at its heart a CirrusLogic CS4392K digital to analogue converter, able to accept content at up to 32-bit/192kHz as well as DSD2.8 and 5.6, and has both digital and analogue output. That makes it suitable for use not only with Android phones and tablets, but also with laptops when on the move.

An alternative way of listening on the move is provided by Bluetooth speakers, and the £50 i-box Slix 4 is one of the most compact of its kind. Just over 15cm wide, and less than 6cm tall and 3cm deep, and with a built-in rechargeable battery with a reported 10 hours' use, the little Slix speaker uses Bluetooth A2DP with Enhanced Data Rate for optimum transmission. Inside the splashproof housing is a custom-tuned amplifier driving a pair of 3.8cm speakers, augmented by a passive bass radiator to enhance low-frequency performance.

Finally this month, the latest version of a favourite of these pages, the original Ruark Audio table/portable radio 5. In addition to the DAB/FM radio reception of the original model, the £199 R1 MkIII now has DAB+ capability for future-proofing, and has gained Bluetooth wireless connectivity to enable it to be used as a speaker for computers, smartphones and tablets. The front and rear panels have been redesigned, with a clear OLED display, and Ruark's trademark Rotodial control on the top of the unit has also been improved.

The R1 MkIII now comes in a choice of Soft White and Soft Black lacquers or Rich Walnut veneer, and remains compatible with the company's optional CarryPack carrying case and BackPack rechargeable battery for use out and about or just around the house. G

**REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH**

# Bowers & Wilkins CM8 S2

## Refined speakers also deliver drama and excitement

Earlier this year the British speaker company Bowers & Wilkins rolled out its revised 600 S2 speaker range, the sixth generation of this popular, value-for-money line-up. Reviewing the DM684 S2 speakers in July, I commented that they delivered 'a confident, dramatic view of a wide range of music', despite not being the biggest-sounding speakers you can buy, and admired their combination of style and value at £800 a pair.

It seems the Worthing company is on a rolling programme of upgrading all its speaker ranges. So why a new CM S2 range now, especially as the top model in the old line-up, the CM10, was only launched around 18 months ago – thus making it the least-changed of the new models? B&W Product Manager Andy Kerr explains it as a necessity, given the improvements made in creating the 600 Series, in order to put some clear water between the entry-level line-up and the CMs.

It's obvious that the two development projects almost happened in parallel: at the CM S2 launch event in late August, we were told that the new speakers would be available immediately and that they had been in production since April this year to build up stocks. Clearly B&W expects the CM S2 series to do very well.

Like the 600 S2 models, the CM S2 is made by B&W's manufacturing operations in China – not a third-party operation but the company's own plant – and extends from small bookshelf/standmount speakers right up to the CM10 S2 flagship, taking in centre speakers and a subwoofer along the way. Only one other model in the range adopts the pod-mounted tweeter used in the CM10 S2 and derived from the company's 800 Diamond design. The CM6 S2 is a standmount model selling for £1500 per pair and sits above the CM1 S2, named after the original B&W Compact Monitor that provided the genesis of the entire range, at £650/pr, and the £950/pr CM5 S2. Unusually solid stands are available for these speakers: the FS-CM S2 supports sell for £400/pr.

So which model to choose from the new range? Well, having gone for the DM684 S2 back in July, and having heard that speaker down at Worthing in a direct comparison with its CM S2 equivalent, the CM8 S2, the most compact of the three floorstanding speaker models in the range had obvious appeal.

Selling for £1500/pr, the CM8 S2 speakers fit in below the larger CM9 S2 at £2000/pr and the £3000/pr CM10 S2, and are of a size easily accommodated in most British living rooms, standing just over 92cm tall (with the optional plinth supplied adding a few centimetres) and looking slim and elegant in a choice of gloss black, satin white or rosenut veneer. The previous wenge finish has gone, having declined in popularity, to be replaced by that almost matt white.

In their 'bare feet', the speakers are just 16.5cm wide and 27.7cm deep; add the plinth and the footprint becomes almost 9cm wider and 2.1cm deeper, so really the choice is going to be one of how svelte you like your speakers and whether or not you have children and/or pets running riot.

What's immediately apparent when comparing the DM684 S2 with the CM8 S2 – apart from the latter's more luxurious finish, especially in the deep gloss black of the review pair – is that this is a more substantial model, the extra weight (19.5kg versus the 14.2kg of the less expensive model) making clear the heftier, more solidly braced cabinet.

The new speaker uses a 25mm Decoupled Double Dome tweeter behind a metal mesh protector (designed to be left in place but removable using a tool provided), a dedicated 13cm Kevlar cone FST midrange driver running from 350Hz to 4kHz, and a pair of 13cm Kevlar woofers giving usable bass down into the mid-40s Hz.



### B&W CM8 S2

**Type** Floorstanding loudspeaker
**Price** £1500/pr
**Drive units** 25mm Decoupled Double Dome Tweeter, 13cm Kevlar cone FST midrange driver, two 13cm Kevlar woofers
**Crossover frequencies** 350Hz, 4kHz
**Frequency response** 48Hz-28kHz +/-3db, -6dB at 43Hz and 50kHz
**Sensitivity** 88dB/1W/1m
**Nominal impedance** 8 ohms, 3.1 ohms minimum
**Recommended amplifier power** 30-150W
**Finishes** Rosenut or gloss black with black grille, satin white with grey grille
**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 92.4x16.5x27.7cm (cabinet only), plinth adds 8.7cm to width and 2.1cm to depth
**bowers-wilkins.co.uk**


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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

They respond well to use with high-quality amplification and speakers but don't go overboard...

### MARANTZ CD6005



The Marantz CD6005 is the latest in a long line of high-achieving, modestly priced CD players and at £350 will provide an excellent source for a B&W-based system.

### MARANTZ PM8005 AMPLIFIER



And to partner the Marantz player, the same company's PM8005 amplifier, a powerful design drawing on Marantz reference models and with a high-quality onboard DAC for computer audio.

The Decoupled Double Dome tweeter uses an extra layer of aluminium around the edge of the diaphragm to enhance stiffness, and is decoupled from the main baffle, while the FST (or 'fixed suspension transducer') design of the midrange driver is designed to absorb bending waves in the cone, giving it faster response and a more pistonic motion.

Among the other B&W design elements apparent in the CM8 S2 are the use of a Nautilus tapered tube behind the tweeter to absorb rearward radiation of sound, and the company's familiar Flowport dimpling of the bass reflex port, using the same principle employed on the surface of a golf ball to smooth airflow. In addition, the bass and midrange drivers here have anti-resonance plugs at their centre, designed to reduce higher-frequency break-up, enhance that pistonic motion and absorb voice-coil resonances.

Two-piece bungs are provided for the reflex ports, allowing the user to use either an outer foam ring or both pieces together for a more effective 'plug', thus enabling a degree of bass tuning beyond the simple matter of room-positioning. The drivers are fixed with larger screws than those used in the old CM models, and the fixings hidden by trim-rings only designed to be removed for service. Completing the effect are magnetic grilles, leaving no visible fixings when removed.

The crossover here, like those in the rest of the CM S2 series, uses Evolution capacitors. The speaker terminals comprise two pairs of combination sockets/binding posts, linked with metal bars able to be removed should the user wish to biwire or biamplify the speakers.

## PERFORMANCE

The B&W speakers arrived just after I had taken the 684 S2s back down to Worthing, so it was easy to hear the differences between the two. And while there's a similarity in the overall balance of the two designs in terms of an appealing combination of refinement and excitement, the CM8 S2 speakers are both more impressive-looking, as you might expect given the price difference, and deliver a more substantial and powerful bass, thanks to those twin drivers, but without sacrificing any of the sweetness and clarity of the less expensive model.

Indeed, there's even better openness and air in the midband and treble, I suspect due to that use of a dedicated midrange driver and the enhanced crossover components, ensuring voices and instruments have sparkling presence and character, even when the recorded mix is complex. Playing the dramatic Howells *Stabat mater* in the recent Bach Choir/Bournemouth SO recording on Naxos (11/14), the B&Ws create both an impressively large and full sound stage picture, the recording being atmospheric rather than overly close-miked. It makes for a very satisfying listen.

Switch to the wonderful Reference Recordings disc 'Miraculous Metamorphoses', with the Kansas City Symphony under Michael Stern captured in another of Keith O Johnson's stunning engineering and mastering jobs, and the B&Ws really get their teeth into everything from the subtle detailing of the orchestra to the great, hall-filling sweeps of which it's capable. The compelling low-end punch of those bass drivers is used to good effect in Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphoses*.

On a different tack, baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky's Ondine disc of Russian sacred and folksongs, 'The Bells of Dawn' (11/14), shows the remarkable dynamic ability of the speakers, with the soloist's voice rendered in close detail, set against the soaring accompaniment of the choir in the evocative *A snowstorm sweeps the street*. Lovely stuff – you can almost feel the cold! – and the mesmeric, mystical sound of the title-track is also strikingly effective, closing the set and leaving the listener with a lasting impression not just of the recording but of these superb speakers.

They're room-friendly, too, that taut and tuneable bass plus their compact dimensions making them easy to accommodate. Just give them a little breathing space or use the bungs provided if you're forced to use them close to rear walls, toe them in a little to 'fix' the stereo image and you won't go far wrong. Partner them well and the CM8 S2 speakers are capable of a performance more than able to take on all comers in the sub-£2000 speaker class. G

## Or you could try...

**As mentioned in the main review, the CM8 S2 speakers have some similarities, both in size and in design, to the Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2 speakers launched earlier this year and reviewed in the July issue of this magazine. So, with a price a little over half that of the CM8 S2 speakers, these would make a good choice for anyone wanting a fair amount of the CM speakers' performance but on a more limited budget.**

### Bowers & Wilkins 684 S2



Buy the 684 S2s, and partner them with high-quality but more modest components than those suggested to drive the CM8 S2s, and you could put together a very accomplished system for around the price of the CM8 S2s alone. It won't offer quite the same power, clarity and all-round musical involvement as a pair of the CM speakers driven properly but it'll get pretty close.

### PMC twenty.24

Meanwhile, if you fancy a pair of slimline floorstanding speakers with a powerful sound and you can stretch your budget beyond the price of the CM8 S2s, a fine choice will be the PMC twenty.24s, which are very much in the next league up and sell for around £3400 a pair.

Using the latest version of PMC's tried-and-tested Advanced Transmission line technology, the twenty.24 speakers are capable of superb low-end extension despite only standing about 10cm taller and being a simpler two-way design, with a comparable footprint.



Like the B&Ws, they really thrive when used with an amplifier capable of delivering plenty of clean power; and, like the B&Ws, they come in a choice of high-quality finishes: amarone, oak or walnut, or Diamond Black.

**pmc-speakers.com**

**REVIEW CAMBRIDGE AUDIO ONE**

# Small is pretty beautiful

## No-nonsense micro system has a surprisingly big sound

Regular readers will be familiar with the way Cambridge Audio operates: it designs and engineers its products in its London offices and then has them made, usually in China, to its specification. That enables the brand to combine solid audio engineering with the obvious cost-savings, but for UK buyers there's also slightly more to the process than that: because retail chain Richer Sounds is both the UK distributor of the Cambridge Audio brand and its sole retailer, prices can be kept even more keen.

You see, the traditional way of audio for many brands goes design then manufacturer then national distributor then retailer, and that's just how Cambridge Audio is handled in most other markets around the world. However, effectively cutting out the distribution step in the UK also means losing one whole level of profit margin.

> If there's a problem, it's that past successes have perhaps led to an expectation of class-leading performance

The One system is the latest in a range of Cambridge Audio systems, which also includes the Minx Xi previously reviewed in these pages (12/13). The Minx Xi was originally launched at £599.95 but at the time of writing could be found in Richer Sounds shops for £200 less; the One is £349.95 and – again at the time of writing, as these offers tend to come and go – also available in a package deal with a pair of the company's Minx XL speakers for the same price, again saving £200.

Cambridge Audio supplied a pair of the speakers with the review sample of the One, and rather good they were, too; however, given the transitory nature of these offers, I am here reviewing the One alone, as a 'just add speakers' system. There's another reason for that, as it's possible to buy a number of suitable speakers for use with the One, at prices as low as £100 for the excellent little Roth OLi RA1 model I reviewed in March. If the Minx XLs are still effectively free when you read this, I'd go for them; if not, you have your options.

The One itself may lack the network music streaming capability of the Minx Xi system but it still combines the functions of CD player (using a slot-loading transport Cambridge Audio describes as an 'inhaler type'), DAB/DAB+/FM radio tuner and amplifier, and additionally has Bluetooth wireless connectivity for computers and portable devices, and USB, coaxial and optical digital inputs capable of handling content at up to 24-bit/96kHz. Analogue inputs are available on one set of RCA phonos and a front-panel 3.5mm socket and, as well as the high-quality speaker terminals, there's a subwoofer output and a 3.5mm headphone socket. Finally, a USB-A socket is provided on the rear panel, purely to charge suitable devices.

The One system delivers 30W per channel into 8 ohms using conventional Class AB amplification (rather than the increasingly common digital alternative), with a large toroidal power supply, while digital-to-analogue conversion is in the hands of Wolfson's WM8728. Tone controls are buried in the system's menus, along with a 'direct' bypass for the simplest signal path, and there are also alarm and sleep functions, plus a defeatable automatic standby mode, implemented after 30 minutes of inactivity. The whole unit is built on a rigid aluminium chassis, and the One is available in gloss black or white.

### PERFORMANCE

For all its flexibility, the One system is among the simplest to set up and use, thanks in no small part to the Azur Navigator supplied with the unit, which is rather more satisfactory than the 'credit card' handsets often provided with systems like this. USB connection is made simpler by the fact that the One uses USB 1.0 and 1.1, so won't need any drivers to be loaded on PC or Mac computers in order to work, and the Bluetooth link is established quickly and simply with suitable devices. In fact, the only real set-up required is the connection of an aerial for radio reception, the scanning/tuning-in of stations and the storing of favourites using the five front-panel preset buttons.

It's also a very presentable-sounding little system: it doesn't set any new standards at this price-level but it's certainly competitive with the likes of Denon's D-M39DAB and Ceol models, the Marantz M-CR510 and M-CR610 and the like. The sound is well balanced, with good scale and substance in the bass and decent clarity in the midband and treble; and whether using the radio tuner (for which a decent outdoor aerial helps no end), inhaling CD player or a computer CD source, the system both retains its composure and proves able to deliver plenty of level if required. The Bluetooth connection isn't the best-sounding in the world but will be adequate for Spotify and the like, meaning that for optimum sound from a computer I'd stick with a wired USB connection if at all possible.

Although the balance here is warm and slightly enriched, the system still demonstrates plenty of pace and snap with highly rhythmic music, and gives good insight into instrumental and vocal timbres and techniques. If there's a problem with the Cambridge Audio One, it's that past successes have perhaps led to an expectation of class-leading performance. While you don't quite get that here, this is a system well on the pace in a competitive sector and worthy of serious consideration. G




**SPECIFICATION**
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO ONE

**Type** Micro system
**Price** £400
**Built-in sources** CD player, DAB/DAB+/FM tuner
**Inputs** Bluetooth, USB-B, coaxial/electrical and optical digital, one line-in on RCA phonos, 3.5mm stereo line input on front panel
**Outputs** One pair of speakers, subwoofer, headphones
**Other connections** Radio antenna, USB-A for charging portable devices
**Power output** 30Wpc into 8 ohms
**Finishes** Gloss white, gloss black
**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, 'get started' radio antenna
**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 23x11.2x29.5cm
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# How the hi-fi landscape keeps changing

## Unlikely alliances, takeovers and new products have shaped the audio world in 2014: where we go from here is anybody's guess



Naim's mu-so: the company's first wireless music system, available on the high street

However you assumed the hi-fi market would develop as we went into 2014 is probably wrong by now. A massive computer company has bought a leading headphone brand; one of the most specialist British hi-fi names has launched an all-in-one system, on sale in John Lewis; a famous Japanese name has returned, citing its view that the way we listen is changing – again; and Chinese companies continue to make inroads into the world audio markets, through both manufacturing and acquisitions.

For all that, the shape of the audio landscape is as unique for what hasn't changed as for what has. At the beginning of the year, the smart money would have been on the rise of streaming services making the CD, let alone the LP, all but obsolete, the rise of iTunes looked unstoppable, and the whole world – well, the audiophile world anyway – held its breath to see how the much-vaunted Pono system would change music for ever.

Yet in the past 12 months, or at least in the 10 months up to the date when this is being written, none of that has really happened. True, we've seen the rise of streaming services, both for music and for video content, but nothing has yet emerged to bestride the global music market as does, for the sake of argument, Apple's iTunes. Instead, a vast array of music services have sprung up or developed their offerings, meaning audio hardware manufacturers have been forced to adopt a whole load of systems, software and licences, and hope that they've done the right thing by backing Spotify, or Qobuz, or Tidal – or whatever. As one said to me the other day, 'Wasn't it all a lot easier when we just had to make a thing that played CDs?'

He's right; for while the audio industry, and indeed the consumer electronics industry as a whole, seems to love a format war (think Betamax/VHS, MiniDisc/DCC, Blu-ray/HD-DVD), the state we're in at the moment, with a stack of incompatible streaming services and devices, and a choice of systems defining what you can and can't watch, is as destructive as any hardware format battle of the past. Depending on which TV series you want to watch, you buy a set-top box from Google, or Apple, or Amazon; depending on the music you want to enjoy, the format(s) on which you want to hear it and more specifically the labels from which you want to hear content, you choose an AV receiver or a network player or similar device.

It's a nightmare, as big business dinosaurs battle for their share of the content territory, and a very long way from the 'one size fits all' standard of CD:

> 'The shape of the audio landscape is as unique for what hasn't changed as for what has'

buy a disc, pop it in your CD, SACD, DVD or Blu-ray player – or even your computer – and it simply plays. No fuss, no choosing drivers or checking you have the correct subscriptions – it plays.

It's no wonder that the established players in audio are regrouping and reassessing the kind of products they're offering. The only answer is to make something with as wide an appeal as possible, or at least engineer it in such a way that it can be adapted in the future to suit whichever delivery system is flavour of the month.

After all, Naim took a huge leap of faith when it announced its mu-so system, an all-in-one wireless music player complete with speakers and amplifiers onboard; its first to be made outside the Salisbury factory (in China, in fact); its first to be sold through the likes of John Lewis, Richer Sounds and the Apple Store; and its first to offer Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay and Spotify Connect. And yet much of the reaction has been along the lines of 'Why hasn't it got…?' or 'So why don't all the other products now have Bluetooth and AirPlay and…?'

Then there's Apple. Having bought headphone company Beats for a multibillion-dollar sum, it seems to be taking quite a while to work out what to do with the brand. Wearable technology? Well, there's headphones, and then… An even stronger iTunes? Sales on Apple's music platform are well down on 2013 levels, despite strategies such as tying in leading artists to the service to the exclusion of the likes of Spotify, not to mention giving away exclusive content to iTunes users.

What's more, it's reportedly booted all Bose products out of its Apple Stores, seemingly to reduce the amount of competition Beats faces in those outlets. The Bose response in the UK? You can now buy a wide range of its products through warehouse retailer Argos, and thus availability has widened.

The world is changing, and manufacturers, distributors and retailers alike have got to keep ahead of the game. Increasingly they're not selling consumer durables any more; they're peddling fashion. Technics returned to the audio market in a blaze of publicity a few months back and now the company seems to be trying to work out whether its assumed fanbase of listeners, holed up in their dens or man-caves ready to listen seriously all over again, is actually there. Technics says that this trend away from streaming music as a background and into 'lean forward' listening is both real and being led by trends here in Europe; I, for one, hope it's on to something. G

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# NOTES & LETTERS

No one can match Nash • The origins of minimalism • Birgit Nilsson in her prime

*Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com*

## Heddle Nash remembered

It was great to learn of yet another recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* (November, page 71). I don't know how many are still extant. However, it is pertinent that the name of Heddle Nash – England's greatest lyric tenor – is mentioned, as it is in every review of *The Dream*, as being the touchstone by which all other artists in the tenor role are measured. He was the soloist in the first performance I attended, in 1946 at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. The conductor was Malcolm Sargent. Nash sang the part from memory on both occasions that I heard him and left an indelible memory which often comes to mind when I hear the work.

I wrote to *Gramophone* some years back following a new recording of the work and was surprised to receive a phone call from Nash's younger son, David, thanking me for mentioning his father. He sounded amazed that his father was still remembered.

*Walter Hurst*
*Oxton, Wirral, UK*

## Minimalism – the term

With reference to your article on Michael Nyman (October, page 72), although it may be true that Nyman first used the term 'minimal' in 1969 to describe works by Terry Riley and Steve Reich, it had by then already gained currency in relation to visual art. As early as 1965 Barbara Rose published the article 'ABC Art' in the journal *Art in America*. This was a lucid and sympathetic analysis of the minimalist aesthetic. In 1968 Gregory Batcock's *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* offered up an overview of the aesthetic preoccupations of certain artists, including Frank Stella, Donald Judd and Carl Andre. It is unlikely that Nyman, working as a music journalist, would have been unaware of these developments in the visual arts. Thus to describe, in 1969, certain music as 'minimal' would have been not so much an invention but an extension of a term already in current use.

*David Gash, via email*

## Don't forget Igor Oistrakh

My jaw dropped when I read Anne Thackray's letter in November (page 124) about Igor Oistrakh's recording of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with his father, David, conducting, since my father purchased this record in Canada in the 1970s and it has remained my favourite recording of this work, despite my having heard almost every available version during almost 40 years of record collecting. I, too, have looked long and hard for a CD version but, alas, to no avail. Come on, Melodiya, please open the vaults and make two music lovers very happy indeed.

*Robert Roy*
*Edinburgh, UK*

## Bricks and mortar

In this age of online retail it is easy to believe that the specialist CD shops have vanished. I cannot be alone in lamenting the days of happy hours spent browsing through the actual discs and asking for advice regarding the various recordings, rather than just looking at a listing on a website. The pleasure of the surprise of coming across a new disc that I was unaware of has sadly gone for ever now that we are able to view forthcoming releases months in advance and the surprise, not to mention the anticipation, has to some extent gone. But one can still receive a personal service and retain some of the pleasure of visiting a physical shop, even if only by phone. So imagine my sadness when I read in the latest newsletter from Bath Compact Discs that they are to close their shop in the new year to concentrate on mail order and their online store (at **bathcds.co.uk**). A sad day as another shop vanishes, though I am certain that their excellent service will continue.

*Chris Driver, via email*

## Nilsson's Elektra

I refer to Richard Lawrence's review (October, page 94) of the newly released *Elektra* with Birgit Nilsson and Karl Böhm at the Vienna Staatsoper in December 1965. As he most astutely observed, this *Elektra* indeed 'just about beats them all'. I would like to confirm that this was Birgit Nilsson's first *Elektra* outside Sweden.

*Rutbert Reisch*
*President, Birgit Nilsson Foundation*
*Vienna, Austria*

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

## *Letter of the Month*

### Amadeus's Britten



I heard the broadcast of the 1976 premiere of Britten's String Quartet No 3 (Collection, November, page 104). If a recording can be found and issued of both the Schubert G major and the Britten it will be found to have been among the best things the Amadeus ever did. The Hänssler CD comes close, but *Death and the Maiden* in the event isn't the ideal context that the G major provided. The DVD offers the Schubert Quintet as companion, which is even further away. I don't think it is simply the emotion of the occasion that I remember: nearly 40 years later the quartet still seems new.

*Jim Brennan, via email*

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**Please send letters** responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the January issue by December 10. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

PRESTO CLASSICAL

## Editorial notes

In our October obituary (page 125) of the Dutch soprano Cristina Deutekom, we misspelled her first name.

Teddy Tahu Rhodes (Mahler songs, November, page 75) is from New Zealand, not Australia.

In a review of Josef Suk's Four Pieces (October, page 52) we referred to 'the composer's own recording'. It was the composer's grandson, of the same name, who made the recording in question.

The review of 'Music for Remembrance' (November, page 82) credited to Caroline Gill was written by Marc Rochester.

# OBITUARIES

A fine soprano with a short career, a choral conductor and a composer

## ANITA CERQUETTI

*Soprano*
*Born April 13, 1931*
*Died October 11, 2014*



The career of Anita Cerquetti represents one of the great what-ifs of post-war opera. The Italian soprano, who has died at the age of 83, was active on the opera stage for less than a decade, leaving several thrilling live documents of her short career but only two studio recordings, both made for Decca in 1957: Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* and a famous recital disc (deleted by Decca but now available on Preiser).

She was born in Montecorsaro, near Ancona, in 1931 (although some sources suggest 1927) and made her stage debut as Aida in Spoleto in 1951. She tackled most of the great Verdi roles in a career that was based almost exclusively in Italy, making her La Scala debut in 1958 with Abigaille (*Nabucco*). It was with Bellini, though, that she stole the headlines in January 1958, taking over – amid much scandal – from Callas in Rome Opera's season-opening production of *Norma*.

Her luxurious and vibrant voice, as preserved on disc, shows remarkable consistency across the range, and is handled with impeccable style and formidable technique. Cerquetti's many live recordings, including a famous all-star *Ernani* from Florence under Mitropoulos in 1957, show how she could come to life on stage.

Ill health is usually cited as the reason for Cerquetti's retirement in 1960, although a certain amount of uncertainty and speculation persists. Whatever the case, that decision deprived the post-war opera world of one of its great Verdi voices, and, as Alan Blyth wrote in *Gramophone* in 1972, 'left a gap that has never really been filled in the royal line of Italian *spinto* sopranos'. **Hugo Shirley**

## DAVID TRENDELL

*Organist and conductor*
*Born August 17, 1964*
*Died October 28, 2014*



Conductor David Trendell, since 1992 Organist and Director of Music of the Chapel Choir of King's College London, has died aged 50. According to a statement issued by the college, he died in his sleep during the night, having conducted the chapel choir in a rehearsal only that evening.

Under his leadership, the choir made a number of well-received recordings. Most recent, reviewed in July, was a disc of music by Desenclos, along with Poulenc and Villette, about which Richard Lawrence wrote: 'David Trendell gets a first-rate performance from his choir, full of light and shade.'

Trendell began his music career as a chorister at Norwich Cathedral, later becoming an alto choral scholar before gaining an organ scholarship at Exeter College, Oxford. As well as his post at King's College, Trendell was Director of Music at St Mary's Bourne Street, London. **Martin Cullingford**

## STEPHEN PAULUS

*Composer*
*Born August 24, 1949*
*Died October 19, 2014*



Stephen Paulus's lyrical choral works – of which he wrote more than 400 – are part of the regular repertoire of many choirs around the world. Paulus also composed 13 operas and founded the American Composers Forum, a vital support network for many composers. Three of his choral works were included on 'Beyond All Mortal Dreams', an anthology of contemporary American choral music by the Trinity College Choir and Stephen Layton on Hyperion (10/11), which our critic Marc Rochester described as 'intensely lovely'. **James McCarthy**


**NEXT MONTH**

JANUARY 2014



**Winterreise**

Richard Wigmore talks to some of today's leading performers of Schubert's song cycle, and explores the power this masterpiece continues to have on today's audiences

**Michael Tilson Thomas**

We meet the American conductor as he celebrates both his 70th birthday and two decades at the San Francisco Symphony

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David Gutman explores the Russian composer's longest symphony, and recommends his favourite interpretations, in the Gramophone Collection

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**Davies, PM** Beltane Fire. Orch Wks. *BBC PO/Davies, PM.* Ⓑ **8 572362**
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**Tchaikovsky** Orch Wks (r1952-57). *New York PO/Mitropoulos.* Ⓢ ② Ⓡ **WS121 207**
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**Goldenthal** Othello Sym. *Aukso Orch/Moś.* Ⓕ **ZM001**
**Goldenthal** Chbr Wks. *Chiu/Harris/Ting/Roberts.* Ⓕ **ZM002**

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**Verdi** Trovatore (pp2012). *Sols incl Didyk & Poplavskaya/Monnaie/Minkowski.* Ⓕ DVD **BAC108;** Ⓕ BD **BAC408**

**BELVEDERE**
**Handel** Rodelinda. *Harnoncourt.* Ⓕ ② **BVD10144**

**C MAJOR ENTERTAINMENT** *cmajor-entertainment.com*
**Bizet** Pêcheurs de perles (pp2014). *Sols incl Ciofi/San Carlo Th, Naples/Ferro.* Ⓕ DVD **719508;** Ⓕ BD **719604**
**Puccini. Verdi** Bel canto d'amore. *Various artists.* Ⓕ ⑤ DVD **719708;** Ⓕ ⑤ BD **719804**
**Strauss, R** Rosenkavalier (pp2014). *Sols incl Stoyanova/VPO/Welser-Möst.* Ⓕ ② DVD **719308;** Ⓕ BD **719404**

**ERATO** *warnerclassics.com*
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**Various Cpsrs** Entre elle et lui. *Dessay/Legrand.* Ⓕ DVD **2564 62192-0;** Ⓕ BD **2564 62191-7**

**EUROARTS** *euroarts.com*
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**Mozart** Pf Concs. *Previn.* Ⓕ BD **200 1024**
**Various Cpsrs** In Rehearsal & Performance. *Kleiber, C.* Ⓕ DVD **206 0868**
**Various Cpsrs** Voices. *Various artists.* Ⓕ BD **307 5084**

**FRA MUSICA** *fraprod.fr*
**Hahn** Ciboulette (pp2013). *Toulon Op Orch/Equilbey.* Ⓕ DVD **FRA009;** Ⓕ BD **FRA509**

**KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE** *kings.cam.ac.uk*
**Various Cpsrs** Carols (pp2013). *Ch of King's Coll, Cambridge/Cleobury.* Ⓕ DVD **KGS0008**




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# John Bird

Social entrepreneur, founder of The Big Issue and author of The Necessity of Poverty on discovering music and the joy of singing



My father, even though he was a builder's labourer, was obsessed with Caruso, and I inherited that. We were always listening to Caruso on a Sunday morning as the dinner was being made. I always remember that and it's incredible that my father should have been so aware of the power of the human voice.

**When I was** in a boys' prison they used to let us out and we'd go to see the local Guildford Municipal Orchestra, and everybody else was there because it gave them a chance to look at girls, but I was there riveted by, obsessed by, the music. I'm a BBC Radio 3 man, and when I later worked in factories as a printer we used to have these arguments as to whether we listened to Radios 1, 2 or 3 – and I always won. So in the course of the working day I would have more hours listening to Radio 3 than they would get, and I would lecture them and say that the music they wanted to listen to was a corruption of their mind, body and ears! And eventually I won some of them over.

**When I was** in my late thirties I decided to become a mature student, and one of the subjects I went to study was Music, at a place called the Ealing College of Higher Education – now it's part of the University of West London. There was a guy who taught music called Christopher Small, who died recently, and it was a brilliant course. The aim wasn't to try to turn people into musicologists – it was just to lift your cultural soul. I had a brilliant time. That's where I discovered Liszt.

**For three years** I lived around the corner from Wigmore Hall in Marylebone and I'd go to concerts every week. I'd given up drinking, smoking and chasing women – and I had to fill my time! So I would do that by going to the Wigmore. I wanted to participate in this art form – where so much discipline, so much effort and so much refining had been put in to it. That's the staggering thing about live music. I miss that now. I do occasionally go to things in Cambridge, but not as much as I used to. We can always pop up to Ely, too. I recently went into the Lady Chapel in Ely Cathedral, just by happenstance, and I soon had my whole family watching a workshop of four or five cellos. It was absolutely riveting.

**I'm not scientific** about my appetite. I've been listening to a lot of Rachmaninov and I'm interested in people like Hindemith, people who are kind of off the radar. I like atonality and I like Webern's music, and I got into that largely through the filter of Liszt. Someone once said to me, 'you're listening to Liszt, what's he like?' And I said that he's like a man playing with his elbow. I'm a devotee, not an aficionado – I just love classical music. I'm obsessed.




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I always feel an enormous regret every year that because of my schedule I never get to the BBC Proms. I'd like to turn my book *The Necessity of Poverty* into an opera, based on the idea that it might be fun to discuss the gap between rich and poor in a kind of recitative. Not *The Beggar's Opera* updated, nor a *Threepenny Opera*. Rather something more stringent and perhaps strident.

**I spoke at** a fund-raising event at St Martin in the Fields last Christmas and I sang the *Kyrie eleison*. They didn't ask me to – they asked me to give a talk, but I said 'before I do my talk I'd like to do what I've always wanted to do', and so I sang *Kyrie eleison* – and I got them all singing!

**I'm on my** third family, so even though I'm a 68-year-old guy I've got very young children and I'm always singing to them. All my kids have always said: 'Dad, where do you get all those songs from?' If we're in the car I don't like the radio on because you can't quite hear it in the back, so if we're going on a journey I'll sing. And they're all learning the songs. With my family being Irish I know lots of songs and I love folksongs – it's good for you to keep singing. Ⓖ
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